

# workers power

Monthly paper of the Workers Power Group No.103 March 1988 ISSN 0263-1121 30p/10p strikers

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## STRIKE WITH THE HEALTH WORKERS



FEBRUARY WAS a marvellous month for militancy. There were strikes in the health, the coalfields, on the ferries, in the civil service and in the car industry. They put the wind up the British bosses.

Thatcher's smug claims that she had tamed the working class for good were premature. The confidence of thousands of rank and file workers has proved that.

Working class anger has exploded over a number of issues—pay, the NHS, privatisation, flexible working, pensions and redundancies. But the issue that has provoked the most clear cut, class wide solidarity action has been the NHS.

Health workers have staged a whole series of actions in protest against the underfunding of the NHS, the low pay they try to live on and the appalling conditions they work under.

On 3 February over 10,000 workers struck. In London, thousands of nurses and other health workers put up picket lines outside most of the city's major hospitals. On 10 February similar numbers took strike action in the north west. On Merseyside health workers were joined by car workers from the Ellesmere Port Vauxhall plant. They had voted to strike in support of the NHS workers. Strikes by fire-fighters and 4,000 council builders were staged in support of the Manchester NHS day of action on 19 February.

In Scotland, a sustained campaign of strikes against privatisation in the NHS culminated in a massive strike in every hospital on 24 February. Similar days of action have taken place in Belfast and in Wales.

Other workers have been encouraged to press forward with similar protests. London teachers and civil servants have staged days of strike action. In the local government and education sector, 8 March has been named as a day of action.

Every one of these examples

### GENERAL STRIKE ON 14 MARCH!

testifies to the willingness of workers, health workers included, to stand up to the Tories. Yet we have to face the fact that Thatcher has not budged an inch as a result of these protests.

She announced on television that she would review the NHS, with a view to its virtual destruction and replacement by private health insurance schemes. She has made it a point of honour to answer every request for more money for the NHS—in Parliament, from doctors, from wet Tories—with a firm no.

She is not intransigent because she has some hidden strength that we cannot defeat. She is standing firm because our action—a series of days of action—is not hurting her. It has not forced a trial of strength with her yet.

She is gambling on the cash crisis in the NHS being temporarily eased after the budget and on the protests fizzling out. Then she can get on with her plans to destroy the NHS without us getting in her way.

While Thatcher is prepared to ride out the days of action, the trade union leadership are not prepared to go any further. Their record on the days of action that have taken place is bad enough. They washed their hands of the 3 February strikes only then to take control of the other action in order to keep them at the level of harmless protests.

The Nupe leaders have openly refused to call for any strikes. They call every day of action a day of protest. Bickerstaffe and Sawyer have even refused to support Cohse's call for a day of protest on 14 March. Cohse, on the other hand, has refused to give a clear endorsement to any strike action that does take place on that day.

Up and down the country the officials are trying to cool things down. They are talking about a campaign that begins now and lasts until the next general election. That message has been echoed and encouraged by Neil Kinnock. The whole problem is that if Thatcher is not beaten now there won't be an NHS left at all by the time of the next election!

The whole strategy of days of protest and selective action is riddled with dangers. Health workers will be worn down by it, as they were in 1982. The willingness of workers to take solidarity action will evaporate. The Tories will not be obliged to shift their ground one bit. The same goes for the planned action of the teachers, local government workers and civil servants.

The time for action is now. Provided we go all out for victory, Thatcher, just like the Ford bosses, can be forced to back down. In the here and now that means that we

have to unify the struggles taking place into a concerted anti-Tory offensive.

The first step towards this is to make sure that the day of protest called by Cohse for 14 March is a day of strike action. There must be a general strike by all workers on that day in support of the health struggle.

In order to get this, rank and file health workers need to win their hospitals to strike action on the day. They need to send out delegations to all the key workplaces and union branches in their area to appeal directly for solidarity action. They must send out their pickets to the major workplaces on the day. The TUC and the Nupe leaders have refused to take such a course of action. The Cohse leaders are dithering. The strike committees, the militants everywhere must take the lead.

A one day general strike can help prevent the union leaders killing off the fightback. But it will not stop Thatcher. What we need, and need urgently, is to follow a general strike up with a campaign to keep the health workers out. Mass meetings should be called immediately in every hospital on 15 March to win support for an indefinite health strike. Such a strike can and will keep alive the spirit of solidarity that was demonstrated in February. It can bring the conflict with Thatcher to a head. We must fight for solidarity action. We must fight for all sections of workers to bring forward their own disputes and fight alongside the health workers. In doing so we can create the springboard for a class wide offensive that can at last turn the tide on the Tories.

- For a general strike on 14 March!
- Health workers—stay out to win!
- Link the struggles!
- Smash the Tory offensive!

### ISRAELI TROOPS OUT!

EVER SINCE December the uprising in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip against the occupying Israeli troops has stayed firmly in the news. By now tens of youth have been murdered and scores more unarmed demonstrators beaten, maimed or shot in the back.

Even Neil Kinnock, head of the staunchly pro-Israel Labour Party, was moved to tears after seeing the effects of the brutally savage beatings carried out by the Zionist soldiers. Now the whole world has had the chance to watch Zionism's calculated acts of barbarism against the Palestinians on the TV news.

Despite these scenes none of the major western imperialist powers will consider a fundamental break with Israel—casting it into political and economic isolation. They will not because ever since its creation in 1948 the state of Israel has served the imperialist cause in the Middle East. Israel has acted to disrupt and divide the unity of purpose of the various Arab states in the region, a unity which may have threatened the massive economic and military interests of imperialism in the area.

For its part imperialism was prepared to underwrite the creation of a Zionist state in the midst of another nation—Palestine. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza—the result of the 1967 war—carried the national oppression of the Palestinians one step further.

Now that the Palestinians have risen in their thousands against oppression, the British labour movement must support them and denounce the sham democracy of Israel which systematically discriminates against Arabs. The trade unions and Labour Party must unconditionally declare themselves in favour of self-determination for the Palestinians and demand the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the West Bank and Gaza. ■



# THE NEW MOOD OF MILITANCY

THIS YEAR has opened with a major revival of working class resistance to the employers and the Tories. Right across the public sector and in significant industries in the private sector, workers are locked in battle.

The potential is there for a major strike wave that could smash the bosses' offensive. For this potential to be realised workers must push their own struggles forward and develop the means of generalising and linking up these struggles into a working class offensive against the Tories.

A number of factors explain the present wave of disputes. In part it is prompted by the very ferocity of the employers' attacks. The sacking of striking seafarers on the Isle of Man ferry, TV AM's dismissal of its ACTT members and British Coal's campaign to break the NUM and Nacods are all examples of the hard line, union-busting confidence of many employers.

The new militancy also reflects the breadth of the battle lines that the Tories have created across the public sector. 'Left' Labour councils are now dishing out the cuts against traditionally well organised local government workers in Nalگو (Camden) and the AEU (Lambeth). Plans for a major restructuring and privatisation of the civil service have been unveiled. Having lost their pay battle the teachers are now faced with the Baker Bill and in London the break up of ILEA. Most visibly the new militancy has boiled over in the health service fuelled by anger over pay and the intolerable conditions resulting from cuts and privatisation.

The public sector workers at the sharp end of these attacks are on the defensive. Many are still feeling the effects of previous defeats on their confidence and willingness to fight. Most have little tradition of organised militancy. The union leaders will try to keep each issue and dispute separate. In the civil service, local government and schools they have already conceded most of the ground demanded by the bosses. But even amongst these public sector workers anger is building up, as strikes in the DHSS and DoE show. And across the whole public sector the existence of a common enemy—the Tories—points to the potential for an explosion of generalised action.

The confidence of such workers to go forward depends to an important extent on the combativity of other sections of workers who have

been drawn into struggle. The recent 'mini-boom' has triggered a revival of combativity in the traditionally well organised car and components industry. With the threat of unemployment receding (it has been falling for 18 months now and most car bosses have recently been taking on new labour), with order books full and profits high, car workers have been stung into action against an ever more repressive work regime and low pay. There are two important aspects to the current car disputes.

Firstly workers are resisting the imposition of flexible working. The car bosses were trying to spearhead an offensive on the issue of working practices for the entire engineering industry. Fords, for example, initially wanted to create a pool of part time labourers in their drive for renewed casualisation.

At present this issue has a resonance far beyond the confines of the car and engineering industry. UCU workers, for example, accepted their flexible working package by just 57% and are continuing to resist its implementation in many offices. Civil service workers are fast learning what flexible working means.

Secondly, the car workers are giving voice to a mounting anger at manual workers' wage levels. The Thatcher years have seen a massive increase in differentials between manual, white collar and managerial levels. The *Financial Times* recently reported that between 1979 and 1986 average male earnings rose in real terms by 15.7%. Within that picture white collar real wages rose by 22.4% and manual real wages by only 5.7%. In construction and mining they have risen by only 3.0%. The low wage economy that led Fords to base so much of their European production here has generated the anger that has been expressed in a whole series of clashes in the motor industry.

Strikes by Longbridge and Cowley drivers in January were the overture to these new battles. Ford workers followed up with decisive ballot rejections of deals

sponsored by the union leaders and solid strike action.

The Ford bosses' climb down will serve to encourage all workers. It shows that the bosses and the Tories are not invincible. The Trade Union bureaucracy's twin refrains since the miners' strike have been that the Tories cannot be beaten except at the ballot box and that the members have got no heart for a fight. These claims have both been well and truly rubbished by the February strike wave, by rank and file workers taking the initiative and fighting back. Health workers will be encouraged and made more confident by the events at Fords. It will serve to dispel the hesitancy amongst other groups of workers. It made the battles at Land Rover and at Renault in Dunstable, virtually inevitable. It gave heart to the P&O strikers who have repeatedly voted to continue their action in the

the action at Fords served to swing the mood of the workforce.

Within the various skirmishes that are taking place there are a series of points of potential generalisation. There is the general cuts and privatisation offensive that affects all public sector workers. In the private and manufacturing sector the inter-linked issues of pay and a productivity offensive via flexible working, face increasing numbers of workers. The bosses are alarmed at the present rate of pay settlements—which *The Economist* claims have been running at 12-13% in the last months! That's why the Tories will be so adamant about holding the line on pay at Land Rover.

They have also failed to make sufficient headway in closing the productivity gap with their US and Japanese rivals. Productivity in Japa-

for us' here lies the potential for large scale solidarity action. Already at Frickley, Ellesmere Port and Thorn EMI this potential has been realised on the various days of action.

Solidarity with the health workers is a key focus, at the moment, for building a generalised anti-Tory offensive inside the working class. This is why every call for solidarity action from health workers must be answered with solidarity strikes and mass demonstrations. Working class anger must be ever more visible on the streets. In every locality delegate action committees must be formed representing every sector of workers locked in battle. Across the public sector and between the private and public sectors these committees must coordinate the action and inspire other workers to take up the fight.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to see the struggle in the NHS as the exclusive path to a generalised fightback. We must not counterpose the fight to spread sectional grievances to the need to generalise the struggles around the NHS. *Socialist Worker* (20.2.88) has taken from the Ellesmere Port strike that:

'Even workers who aren't confident enough to take on their own boss are willing to take action for the health workers.'

'Defence of the health service' becomes for them the only issue that can unify the working class.

In reality developing a wave of militancy around the NHS depends both on effective action by health workers themselves and on the rekindled confidence of a more combative class ready, willing and able to take on their own bosses.

The struggle for an all-out indefinite health strike and the struggle to get all sections of workers to bring forward their own disputes are therefore complementary tasks of the hour.

What *Socialist Worker* also ignores are the other focal points for united class action that have become apparent in other recent disputes. Registered in the wave of stoppages

is a growing feeling that now is the time to take on the Tories and the bosses. This mood will become stronger the more groups of workers take up the cudgels against their own bosses. In Scotland the fight for the NHS is coinciding with major tenants' demonstrations and resistance to the poll tax. In the coalfields it coincides with a ruthless British Coal offensive that miners must resist in the immediate period if their organisation is not going to be butchered, ready for the privatisation of mines. Throughout the public sector it coincides with a brutal managerial offensive.

In every struggle the unions are going to be up against the anti-union laws. Virtually every form of solidarity action is now illegal. We must be clear that the minute those laws are used against any section of workers in struggle, the rights of every worker in the land to take effective industrial action are under attack. We must respond with an immediate, indefinite general strike to smash those anti-union laws.

The whole situation points to the possibility and necessity of launching a generalised offensive against the Tories. We have to say loud and clear that the time to fight the bosses is now at the same time as other workers who are already taking them on. Now is not the time to wait and see. Engineers and civil servants facing flexible working and redundancies must fight now. So must the miners. With the seafarers, car workers and hospital workers already resisting now is the time for all workers to join the battle and roll back the defeats of the last decade.

A spectre haunts the bosses these days. They thought they had silenced the working class. They obviously have not. They have a deep fear that the Stock Exchange collapses of last year were warning signs of an impending recession in the world economy which will sharpen the pressure on them. A working class growing more confident at exactly the same time would seriously challenge their ability to off-load the costs of such a recession onto the workers.

The potential is there to turn the tide on the Tories. The wellspring of working class anger is there. The range of issues that workers are being forced to fight on points towards the pressing need for a generalised workers' offensive against the Tories on every front.

1988 has not started well for the Tories and the bosses. Lets make sure it ends even worse. ■

*The whole situation points to the possibility and necessity of launching a generalised offensive against the Tories*

face of an onslaught by the courts.

What is impressive about the present situation is that just as more and more workers are saying 'enough is enough' one sector has notched up a visible victory. True, the Ford workers were sold short by their leaders. But there is no doubt that their action had the bosses on the run. However, many workers still remain hesitant about sticking their necks out. The Vauxhall workforce is perched on the knife edge of taking on their employers. Because of the vote at Ellesmere Port they accepted the pay deal which they would probably have rejected had Fords already been out. After the Ford strike a far greater confidence was expressed in Ellesmere Port's vote for solidarity strike action with NHS workers. And again in Vauxhall management had to climb down on their planned attack on workers' pensions in order to avert certain industrial action. Health workers' action and

nese industry was 1.96 times that of the UK in 1980. Now it is still 1.76 times higher. The bosses have to clamp down on pay increases and push through long term deals that secure flexible working practices if they are to cope with the pressure on them of capitalist competition. In preparing and launching this offensive, however, they face a workforce more liable to resist them.

But the immediate link between the struggles in the private and public sectors is the burning concern of workers with defending and improving the NHS. At a time when the rich get richer by the day and when the Tories are set to reward their class with yet more tax hand-outs, workers know that the fight in the NHS directly concerns their own health as well as the livelihood of thousands of health workers. Workers know that a declining NHS is a threat to the future security of themselves and their families. Coupled with a traditional 'care for those who care

published by Workers Power BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX

printed by Spider Web Offset 14-16 Sussex Way, London N1

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**Fund Appeal**

This month our fund drive has brought in £10 from readers in East London, £10 from a reader in North London and a bumper £164 from central London. So London is leading the field taking our total to £1,309. We still have £3,691 to raise by June so come on all you readers—especially outside London. Send in the money and keep up the good work London



# AFTER NUS STRIKE



Under the new Employment Act:

- Scabs will have legal backing even when a majority have voted to strike
- The unions will be unable to discipline scabs
- The closed shop will be outlawed completely
- Union elections will have to be by postal ballot
- Individual union members will be able to sue the union, with financial backing and encouragement from a commissioner
- Unions will be forbidden to pay any fines incurred by members or officials in the course of union business
- New adult training schemes amounting to work for benefit.

## What the laws mean

The existing Tory laws:

- Secondary strikes are illegal. Only disputes between employees and their own bosses are allowed
- Secondary picketing is illegal. A 'code of conduct' means only six pickets are allowed
- Secret ballots must be held before industrial action
- Closed shop agreements have to be balloted every five years and get over 85% support
- Union rule books can be overturned by judges to enforce secret ballots for executive elections
- Workers and unions can be sued if action does not comply with these laws.

# ANTI UNION LAWS MUST BE SMASHED

by Helen Ward

WHEN THE National Union of Seamen called a national strike at the beginning of February, General Secretary Sam McCluskie declared he would rather go to jail than see the attack on jobs and conditions continue.

Less than a week later the fighting talk was over:

'At no time have I or my union intended deliberately to ignore the court or to flout the authority of the law' he said to the courts. He called off the national strike and grovelled to the judges. He declared himself 'very happy' with their ruling which fined the union £7,500 and ordered them to pay an estimated £100,000 costs. Meanwhile the dispute which sparked the action, with the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, was sold out with a deal including job cuts.

The NUS leadership realised, correctly, that their own future existence was threatened by the bosses' continued assault on jobs and work practices. McCluskie said accurately that if they didn't fight now they were 'as good as finished as an effective trade union'. Whilst the bureaucrats have been content to negotiate away their members' jobs, when it comes to threatening their own—as in the case of the union being destroyed—even they have to try and resist.

But McCluskie had forgotten the effect of years of new realism on the trade union movement when he tried to pull off a 'one-out, all-out' strike. The TUC has sat back whilst the Tories have stockpiled an arsenal of laws designed to prevent precisely this kind of effective solidarity action. Every two years a

new Employment Act has been brought in, making solidarity strikes and secondary picketing illegal.

At every vital point in the bosses' use of the laws—after the NGA came the miners' strike, then the Wapping dispute—the TUC has sabotaged resistance. They have urged compliance and passivity. They have sat back while millions of pounds have been stolen from union funds by the courts: the NGA lost £2 million over Warrington, the NUM lost £1.78 million in 1984/5.

The existing anti-union laws have strengthened the ability of the bureaucracy to insist on secret ballots. This has let the union leaders repeatedly sabotage spontaneous walk-outs. 'Wait for a ballot' they say and then they gain time to stitch up a deal whilst militant workers' anger is all too often squandered.

In addition the laws have allowed the unions to 'disown' spontaneous or solidarity action. Rather than leading a coordinated fight, they turn a blind eye to local disputes, or walk-outs in support of the health workers for example, hoping that they will not be fined.

McCluskie tried this argument in the seafarers' strike. Having called a national strike in defence of 161 sacked workers at the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, he quickly changed it into a series of local disputes and not secondary action. This led to the fragmentation of the NUS action—individual ports settled local disputes and went back to work, leaving Dover

out alone, weakening their action.

The failure to resist the laws has given the green light to the Tories to further strengthen their armoury. The latest Employment Bill incorporates even more clauses to be used to destroy collective action. The Tories are confident that they can implement it, not because of their parliamentary majority but because of the record of surrender by the TUC.

The Labour Party and TUC are looking to sectors of the CBI who oppose the Bill to fight alongside them. This is a dead end—these bosses have no interest in defending union rights even if they dispute this or that tactic Thatcher opts for. The only way to prevent the new Bill from being passed is to turn the balance of class forces against the bosses. And the only way to do that is through defiance.

The reason that the Industrial Relations Act was rendered useless in the early 1970s was not because of a Labour Party/CBI/TUC campaign or petition. It was defeated by workers defying the law, taking massive strike action and scaring the wits out of the bosses with the threat of a general strike. This is the way to defeat their laws, on or off the statute books.

We need to defy the laws now. In the current wave of disputes mass solidarity will be needed with those sections of workers who are in the front line. But real solidarity is illegal. If any union is sequestered or any member jailed under the laws an immediate indefinite general strike must be launched. Once the bosses use the law to crush a decisive dispute, nothing less will stop them. ■

# BAKER GOES FOR ILEA

by Steve MacSweeney

THE DECISION of the Tory cabinet to go for the outright abolition of the ILEA will have come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the plans of Thatcher's crew.

It had always been the Tories' intention to remove ILEA. For them it had become a symbol of everything that had to be destroyed; an elected local authority that no-one could expect ever to go Tory, a redistributor of wealth from the rich boroughs and the City to the poorer, and a leading champion of what might be called 'liberal and progressive educational methods'.

After the Tories' election victory, Kenneth Baker decided to force the Authority to make cuts in provision so that, within a few years, it would be impossible to mobilise effective opposition to the final abolition of a run-down service. To further weaken ILEA he proposed, in his Education Reform Bill, to allow the individual boroughs to opt out, a move that would only make financial sense to the richer ones and the City itself.

The cuts Baker demanded were drastic; a 15% reduction in expenditure within the next financial year. ILEA calculated that it could mean 9,000 redundancies, including some 3,000 teachers. No education authority could make cuts like that without seriously damaging the education service it provides.

The Kinnockite leader of the ILEA, Neil Fletcher, responded by

agreeing that the cuts were possible—he merely asked for three years in which to make them. It was only after this public and abject admission of surrender that creatures like Tebbit and Heseltine, whose senses are perhaps more keenly attuned to the possibility of an easy kill than Baker's, first raised the call for immediate abolition, via the same Education Reform Bill.

Not content with abjectly surrendering to the Tory cuts Fletcher, along with Jack Straw, Labour's Education spokesman, proceeded to attack the London teachers in the NUT for going on strike on 11 February against the cuts package! This was enough for Baker. Seeing the ILEA and Labour leaders not only waving the white flag but attempting to sabotage any fightback, he quickly threw in his lot with the immediate abolitionists.

The Tories' plans are clear. They will use the Labour administration in the ILEA to push through the £118 million cuts, a task easier for Fletcher because of Labour's ability to use its links with the trade union leaders to sabotage resistance. They are doing the same with 'privatisation' through competitive tendering throughout the ILEA.

In this way they hope to hand over a 'slimmed down' education system to the boroughs with a weakened trade union movement. The poorer boroughs, like Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Hackney, Lambeth, etc, will have an under-resourced education system left to run 'sink' schools for the working class. Meanwhile Baker's Bill will allow the 'middle class' schools to opt out, with parents and govern-

ment providing the extra resources to these new 'grammar schools', but this time round based purely on 'selection' according to the income of parents.

There are 90,000 workers employed directly by the ILEA. There are millions of parents and school and college students who have a direct interest in confronting and defeating these attacks. The trade unions must take the lead in mobilising these forces to destroy the Tory plans. We must demand the Labour administration refuses to implement the cuts.

The argument being peddled by sections of Labour Party members around *Labour Briefing*, that ILEA members should resign and Labour should not contest the ensuing elections is fundamentally wrong. Those who refuse to pass a no cuts budget should be forced to resign and be replaced by candidates committed to such a policy. Any such elections should be used to mobilise against the Tories.

The proposals, much favoured by the ILEA leaders, for a 'parents' ballot' to demonstrate support for the ILEA will not have the slightest effect on the Tories. Its only use will be if it brings home the issues to parents as part of a wider mobilisation. If it is counterposed to strike action and demonstrations, which it has been in various areas, then it is a complete diversion.

In fighting for united mass mobilisations and strike action—the real way to defeat Baker—militants will have to build on every partial action that the union and Labour leaders feel obliged to call. The ILEA-wide strike on 8 March for example, should be the first focus for all-London action. To

# UNION BUSTING AT TVam

by Sue Todd

AFTER FOUR months of a lock-out technicians at TVam, who originally walked out for 24 hours over a dispute on manning levels, have been sacked.

TVam chief Bruce Gyngell has pledged tough, Murdoch-style, tactics in the dispute. On 25 January he gave the technicians ten days to accept in full, without negotiations, a ten point plan which contains the company's attack on conditions, flexibility and union rights.

The dispute at TVam is critical for the future of unions in the broadcasting industry. Unfortunately the union's response is to play softly, softly, begging to negotiate and even offering suggestions to management on how the company could reduce its overtime bill.

ACTT's General Secretary Alan Sapper has said: 'the only escalation we want now is from other unions'.

The union executive and the TVam strike committee have rejected calls to spread the action. At its last EC meeting a call for a national stoppage of all ACTT members in independent television was overwhelmingly rejected. The ACTT is sitting on its hands fighting a rearguard action, which will result in a terrible defeat, not only for the TVam technicians but for the future of trade unions in broadcasting.

The key words for Thatcher, Peacock

and the TV bosses are 'increased competition, rationalisations and flexibility'. The TV bosses are preparing the ground for what will soon be a £3 million a year deregulated European market. Thatcher has made it known that the TV unions are the next on her union hit-list. Victory for the TVam bosses will set an example throughout the industry. It will give a green light to management everywhere to scrap demarcation and overtime agreements.

The fight to spread the strike must be taken up again. Shops throughout the union should demand the General Council calls a national stoppage, initially of ACTT's members in independent TV, to shut down the network. Strike bulletins should be circulated to all divisions of the union. Meetings should be organised with speakers for the TVam technicians. The union should organise a national demonstration to march to Camden Lock, backed by a national strike in ITV divisions.

ACTT technicians have the power to win. If they lose it will be a prelude to an attack on all TV technicians' pay and conditions. The sackings, plus the TVam journalists' refusal to strike, means that only a national strike in ITV can turn the tide. ■

prepare for it joint union committees should be set up wherever they do not already exist. They should build themselves, representing wherever possible the workplace union organisations, drawing in and building fighting school-based parents' and students' organisations.

Already the leaders of the NUT, under pressure from the Kinnockites, are trying to prevent their members from taking part in the 8

March action. They will not be the only leaders attempting to keep the different sectors separated. The ILEA workers must fight any attempt to 'sectionalise' their struggles. They must go out of their way to link up with other workers in struggle against the Tory cuts—the health workers, the firefighters and the local government workers. Only a massive united fightback can defeat the Tories' plans. ■



# SLG SLITHERS TOWARDS USFI

by Stuart King



The Workers' Party of Brazil, one of the Liason Committee's new 'revolutionary' movements

TEN MONTHS after their *de facto* split with Pierre Lambert's Fourth International (International Centre for Reconstruction—FI(ICR)) the British Socialist Labour Group reappeared to explain their 'new' perspective. Anyone at their 35 strong launch meeting in London who expected some sort of accounting or critique of the international grouping from which the SLG had split after so many years would have been sorely disappointed.

The reason for this was quickly laid bare. The SLG and its international co-thinkers, having broken with Lambert over his most recent tactical turn, have yet to decide just how much of his 'Orthodox Trotskyist' baggage they are going to dump. Judging from contributions at the meeting and the first post-split issue of *Socialist Newsletter* the answer is 'the lot'!

From the early 1980s Lambert's PCI developed its strategic conception of the united front into the idea of creating a series of 'workers parties'. This meant either launching explicitly non-Trotskyist parties like the Movement for a Workers' Party (MPPT) in France and the 'Workers' Party of Peru'. These were little more than sections of the FI(ICR) dressed up as workers parties and built on purely democratic programmes. Or it meant uncritically tailing so called 'independent' workers' parties or tendencies in the workers' movement throughout the world. Pride of place went to the Brazilian Workers' Party. The SLG also uncritically hailed Azapo in South Africa, while at various times 'independent' workers' tendencies in Poland, the Philippines and elsewhere were added as evidence that this development was a worldwide phenomenon. Of particular importance, given the ingrained Stalinophobia of the Lambert tendency was the fact that these tendencies had supposedly broken with Stalinism.

## Intervene

This was in fact a repetition of an old tactic of degenerate 'Trotskyism', one of finding or trying to promote, a 'halfway house' between reformism and revolutionary communism. Far from attempting to intervene in left reformist or centrist currents in the workers' movement, to win them to a revolutionary position, the opposite tactic is developed. The politics of the so-called Trotskyist group are adapted to the existing level of consciousness in order not to 'frighten off' the left reformist and centrist leaders. The *Transitional Programme* is invoked, not as a bridge, starting from the workers' struggles and demands and leading then to the struggle for workers' control and socialism, but as a route backwards, liquidating the Trotskyist programme into the demands considered acceptable to the existing workers' organisations, or more often, their leadership.

On an international level this meant that for the FI(ICR) a 'revolutionary workers' international' could come about which was not a Trotskyist one. Despite Lambert's split with Moreno, the International Workers League (LIT) had equally liquidationist ambitions. Moreno's grouping also developed this position of a new international in which Trotskyists would be a minority. Usually this group looked to the very same 'revolutionary' forces that Lambert did, to produce it. The Brazilian Luis Favre when he was still Lambert's right-hand man and editor of *Tribune Internationale*, organ of the FI(ICR), summed up this position in 1986:

'It has been clearly shown that the process of reconstruction of the Fourth International is not separable from the process of regroupment of the working class

along a new axis, nor from the search by different currents, militants and organisations... for the construction of a revolutionary workers' international.' (*Tribune Internationale* No 34 May 1986 p34)

What then was the basis for the split? Lambert, being a long in the tooth centrist, clearly recognised the danger of allowing completely liquidationist tendencies to develop within his organisation. Like Jack Barnes in the SWP(US) many sections of the FI(ICR) were increasingly finding any reference to 'Trotskyism' or the 'Fourth International' a barrier to their desire to immerse themselves ever deeper into these so-called revolutionary currents. The members of the PCI had their eyes on the Juquin split from the French CP. The Brazilians were participating in Lula's Workers' Party. The SLG was immersed in the British Labour Party and the Canadians in the new Democratic Party. For them all the formal ritualistic

involving the Brazilian, British and Canadian sections plus members of other sections e.g. Ireland and France. The Mexican section, the Marxist Workers League (LOM), proceeded shortly after the split to fuse with the Mexican USFI section—the PRT.

In an article entitled 'Trotskyist Liason Committee Formed' in *Socialist Newsletter* No.52, the SLG outlines the perspectives for this new grouping. They start by rejecting the idea:

'... that any fragment of the atomised Trotskyist movement, either by linear growth or in combination with one or more of the other fragments of the Trotskyist movement, can act as the single political and organisational centre for constructing the mass revolutionary workers' international that Trotsky fought for in the very different conditions of the 1930s.' (p.17)

These are winged words the meaning of which soon becomes apparent in the rest of the article.

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## The course of the SLG and its 'Liason Committee' co-thinkers is symptomatic of the decay of centrism of a Trotskyist origin in the 1980s

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references to Trotskyism and the Fourth International of the FI(ICR) were too much. This was despite the fact that they had been emptied of their revolutionary content.

When Lambert at the FI(ICR)'s General Council meeting of December 1985 declared there was a need to 'encourage the convocation in a year's time of a congress to declare the Fourth International reconstituted' (*Tribune Internationale* No 34) the ground was laid for a split. Within a year Favre was in opposition and being denounced by the PCI. By April 1987 there was a *de facto* split

If none of the fragments of the 'atomised Trotskyist movement' either singly or in combination are going to build a new revolutionary international, who is? It turns out of course to be none other than 'independent' workers' parties and tendencies springing up throughout the world:

'For Trotskyism to have a future we must place ourselves within the unfolding processes of reorganisation and recomposition, within the workers' movements in all countries which are in some instances explosive, in others more tortuous.' (p.18 *ibid*)

And where does the 'future of

Trotskyism' lie according to the article? With the likes of Pierre Juquin whose presidential candidature the 'Trotskyist Liason Committee for a Workers' International' endorsed. Juquin, a long standing CP bureaucrat who split from the French Communist Party, represents no way forward for French workers. The programme on which he is standing is pure left reformism, and what is more he has no significant working class base, despite the LCR's (French USFI) attempts to provide him with one. The politics of Juquin represent a cul de sac for French workers, but one the 'Liason Committee' is happy to try and guide them into.

Other candidates put forward for the 'unfolding process of reorganisation and recomposition' of the working class, include the reformist New Democratic Party of Canada, and the Brazilian Workers Party. In another article the 'revolutionary government in Nicaragua', which in passing is declared to head a 'workers' state', is clearly seen as part of this new movement. Even the Democratic Current, a bourgeois opposition within the ruling Mexican PRI, is accorded a possible 'important place in future developments!' (p.13 *ibid*).

The one grain of truth in the FI(ICR)/Liason Committee perspective is the growth, and development in struggle, of a new and mighty proletarian force in areas of the world which have undergone rapid industrialisation in the last 20 years. Proving the 'Goodbye to the working class' merchants totally wrong, the proletariat world wide has been dramatically strengthened by millions of new proletarians in Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, India and many other countries. These young workers' movements have already shown their mettle, their willingness to enter onto the road of mass strikes and mobilisations—especially in South Africa and Brazil.

## Possibilities

Certainly these proletariats and their struggles open up enormous possibilities for revolutionaries and for socialist revolution. This is especially so as these movements are less in the grip of social democratic and Stalinist bureaucrats and have weaker and less developed trade union bureaucracies than labour movements in the imperialist heartlands. This is itself a reflection of the poverty and exploitation of the proletariat in the imperialised world and the consequent fragility of the labour aristocracy in these countries on which such a bureaucracy could base itself.

But to say this is not to pretend these workers' movements, their new trade unions and parties, are

struggle.

The last thing that workers in these countries need is so-called Trotskyists lauding as 'revolutionary workers' parties', reformist, centrist and petit bourgeois nationalist formations which will only lead the workers and peasants to bloody defeat. Yet this is precisely the road which Lambert and the Liason Committee have been mapping out for any workers foolish enough to be taken in by their right wing centrism.

Already the SLG is having to denounce 'leaderism' and 'super-vanguardism'—not the qualities needed for those who want to adapt opportunistically to each and every 'radical' current in the workers' movement. Already it is having to surreptitiously distance itself from the methods that Trotsky used to build the revolutionary Fourth International. The article on the Liason Committee's perspective is littered with allusions to the 'very different conditions of the 1930s' (p.17), to the 'special tactical forms of that period'(p.19) which cannot be repeated today. Of course what these differences might be is never spelt out, but the conclusions are there. Unlike Trotsky we have, according to the Liason Committee, to build a 'workers' international' which is not necessarily a communist one. 'Such a task is not that of Trotskyists alone' we are told.

## Abandoning

Lambert in one of his contributions to the debate in the FI(ICR) mused as to whether what was needed was not in fact a rebuilt First International. The SLG wish to continue this theme of using the united front method, adopted by Marx and Engels at the very start of the organised workers' movement, to build an international today. In doing so they are willingly abandoning all of the gains of the struggles for revolutionary parties and internationals made by the Bolsheviks in building the Third and by Trotsky with the Fourth. The 'Liason Committee of Trotskyists for a Workers' International' has a method which is a million miles away from that Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

It is in fact much closer to the method of the centrist Independent Labour Party in the 1930s which set out to build an international that stood between the Stalinist Third and Trotsky's Fourth International. In polemicising against this organisation Trotsky could have been describing precisely the 'Workers' International' that the Liason Committee is trying to build when he pointed to it as a collection of:

'hybrid organisations with quite a different past, different ideas, and a different future, which being without a roof, have temporarily associated themselves with the London Bureau. In contrast to this, the sections of the Fourth International are selective bodies which came into existence on the basis of quite definite ideas and methods worked out in struggle with the Second, and Third Internationals and the London Bureau.'

(Writings of Leon Trotsky 1935/6 p275)

That is in the struggle against reformism, Stalinism and centrism.

The course of the SLG and its 'Liason Committee' co-thinkers is symptomatic of the decay of centrism of a Trotskyist origin in the 1980s. The SLG finally declares it has opened discussions with the International Socialist Group in Britain, a group rapidly becoming the political equivalent of a 'rest home' for retired and broken winded centrists. While this might be an appropriate choice for the SLG, even the Mandelites could choke on such an open attack on what after all is the USFI's own fetish—their claim to be the Fourth International. ■

'blank sheets', revolutionary movements unsullied by social democratic or Stalinist reformism. This is the schema that the Liason Committee would like to present as reality. Developments within Cosatu have already shown the continued strength of Stalinism and its popular front perspective in the absence of a real struggle to build a revolutionary communist party in the working class. The black consciousness current, Azapo/Azactu in practice showed it offered no revolutionary alternative. It was equally willing to countenance popular fronts with the employers as a method of



# FIGHT FOWLER'S WORKFARE SCHEME

Compulsory working for your benefits is Norman Fowler's goal. Mick Barr and Sue Thomas show to fight him

**NORMAN FOWLER'S White Paper, Training for Employment marks a new stage in the Government's attack on the unemployed, students and the state provision of further education.**

The 'New Adult Training Programme' (NATP), detailed in the white paper, will replace existing special projects, including the Job Training Scheme (JTS) and the Community Programmes (CPs). The intention is to provide 'training' for 600,000 people a year for £1.4 billion. The full cost of the scheme will be met from existing training budgets with no new funding being made available.

NATP is aimed at people between 18 and 50 years of age who have been registered unemployed for more than six months. Trainees on the scheme will receive 'benefit-plus'. The 'plus' element will, in practice, work out at £5 after the trainees' own contribution to travel expenses.

Fowler describes the scheme as the 'most important and ambitious training programme' ever brought forward by a government. He denies that it will be made compulsory. The white paper, however, makes no reference to the voluntary nature of the scheme, and stresses the government's determination to clamp down on claimants 'deliberately avoiding offers of work'.

Fowler himself has acknowledged the tightening up of the 'availability' for work criteria. This, coupled with the increase in the number of claimant advisers, and the stated intention to strengthen resources devoted to fraud investigation (more snoopers), means that

any debate on compulsion is more one of semantics than practice.

Further confirmation of the real intentions of the scheme came when Fowler declared the end of the '21-hour Rule'. At the moment unemployed people can study for up to 21 hours per week without losing their entitlement to claim benefit. The end of this rule was already planned for YTS age claimants, and is now being extended to all. The abolition of this rule is another step towards forcing the unemployed onto the new scheme and takes away their right to choose a non-vocational course.

What it means for Further Education colleges is the possible closure of many existing courses. In many colleges students on ACCESS, BTEC, GCSE and A Level are largely unemployed. Many FE colleges will be forced further into the domain of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC). Unemployed people will be forced onto 'workfare' schemes and FE teachers will either lose their jobs or find themselves doing little more than policing the unemployed.

The involvement of work experience on the scheme has serious implications for all trade unionists. By providing a supply of cheap labour to employers and the removal of the rate for the job, it undermines negotiated wage rates and conditions. With local authority jobs under threat from the Tories' privatisation plans, it is possible that firms will bid for council work using conscripted labour via the MSC's Workfare scheme.

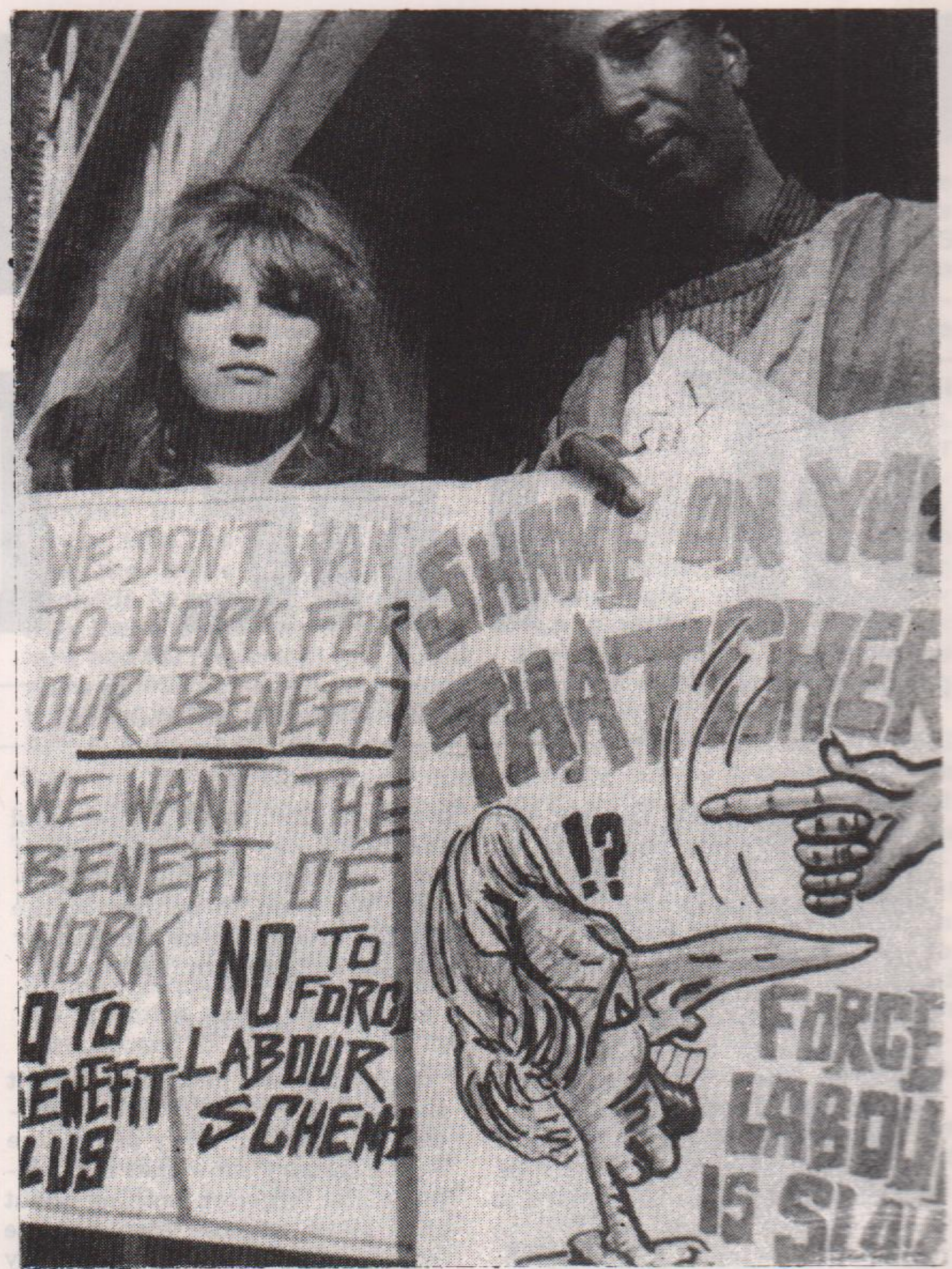
Those on the scheme will not be covered by employment legislation and will therefore have no protection from discrimination. They will be receiving low quality training (with little or no monitoring) in what will be largely non-unionised workplaces.

The TUC Commissioners on the MSC are reported to be pleased with this iniquitous scheme. They are claiming major advances because they have won increases in the additions to benefit and because of Fowler's 'assurances' that the scheme will be voluntary. If the TUC is allowed to get away with approving this scheme, they will have surpassed themselves in betraying the interests of the unemployed and young adults. They must oppose the scheme whether it is nominally voluntary or not.

The Job Training Scheme was defeated by trade unionists in a particular set of circumstances. Most importantly, the boycott was maintained at grass roots level in the public sector in major cities such as Birmingham. Also, the regional TUCs took their decisions to oppose JTS in the run up to the last general election. The TUC tops were fed up with the lack of government consultation. Finally, the scheme was brought in in such a shambolic fashion that even the cut throat private agencies have found it difficult to make money out of JTS.

Some of these circumstances have changed. Fowler is preparing more carefully this time, and by chopping the rate for the job in the Community Programme and pressuring the unemployed out of other forms of education, he is aiming to ensure that no other option is available. CP supervisors and FE workers will face redundancy if they refuse to comply.

This means that an effective campaign to kill the scheme has to start now. The first task is to fight for a boycott position in every union involved, in every regional TUC. We should aim to force a position of opposition and withdrawal from the scheme by the TUC, DHSS, DoE, NALGO and



NATFHE workers are central to this boycott but need the support from a campaign in all the unions.

At the same time the drive to unionise Community Programme workers must be stepped up. CP workers have to organise to be taken on and kept on at full rate for the job.

The National Union of Students ought to be devoting increased resources to organising amongst FE students to build a mass campaign to defend choice for the unemployed and against cheap labour conscription. There are also many students in higher education, particularly working class women and black students, who only got to

college through using the '21-hour Rule'. If Fowler has his way, higher education will be even more the province of school leavers from well-off homes.

If we cannot prevent the trade union leaders capitulating, and the scheme is forced through, trade unionists will, of course, have to seek the best possible conditions in the context of the scheme—increased funding, no compulsion, no job substitution etc. But the priority now is to build a huge campaign of outright opposition amongst unemployed organisations/centres and all trade unions directly involved. We must win the whole trade union movement to support this campaign. ■

**THE KEY question posed at the fourth conference of Black Sections on 27 March is which way forward for the representation of black interests in the Labour Party and the fight against Labour's racist policies on immigration controls, on the police etc. The proposal by Bill Morris to establish a black Socialist Society affiliated to the Labour Party does not provide the answer.**

This move, launched in *Tribune* on 8 January, is aimed at marginalising and then destroying the Black Sections and integrating many of Labour's black activists into Kinnock's new model party. It also reflects the Labour leadership's desire to quell the politically embarrassing revolt of black activists at successive party conferences.

Morris' proposal does not reflect any change in the Labour leadership's policy. The prospect of black workers organising in the party is as fiercely resisted today as at any time in the past. For this reason the response of the Black Section's leadership is particularly worrying. Kingsley Abrams, secretary of Black Sections and Narendra Makanji chair of black sections have openly praised the initiative 'as a positive contribution to an important debate we started five years ago'.

They choose to forget that this is the same Bill Morris, the Deputy General Secretary of the TGWU, who has vilified Black Sections at successive Labour Party conferences. It is also naive to propose as *Socialist Action* does in a recent editorial (No 178) that 'Neil Kin-



nock almost certainly hoped that this proposal would be turned down by the Black Sections'. Morris is a close political ally of Kinnock and undoubtedly was given the job of being the front man in order to test the water.

In particular Kinnock's reluctance to declare his position 'until the ideas take root' appears to be tied to his wish to have the unanimous backing of the black MPs. John Newbigin, Kinnock's race relations adviser was reported in the *Independent* (15 Feb) as seeking a declaration of support for the 'affiliated' option from the four MPs.

Since their election, these MPs have, to varying degrees, distanced themselves from the Black Sections movement, and have refused to be in any way accountable to it. Nonetheless they have attempted to present themselves as a black 'group' in the party from which they hope to strengthen their own base.

They cannot be relied upon to fight this attempt to liquidate the Black Section 'threat. Dianne Abbot, MP for Hackney North and

Stoke Newington has been slightly more willing than the other black MPs to be associated with the Black Section's Campaign. She too has recently stated of Morris' approach that 'The idea is worth looking at [and] if they [Black Sections Campaign] supported it, I would give it my support.'

This is not the sort of accountability we are interested in. If the Black Sections backslide on full recognition they will be seen as accepting Kinnock's arguments to lie low in fighting racism. Such a political retreat would actually hamper the development of perspectives that could lead a fightback against both Tory attacks and Kinnock's cowardice.

The kind of perspectives needed are, firstly to organise the defence of Black Sections and oppose these new moves towards a black socialist society. We need to build an active Black Section, which proves itself not in terms of accommodating to the 'new realists' of the Labour Party but as a fighting organisation of black socialists.

Secondly, in order to build itself and make itself relevant to the

## BLACK SECTIONS

# NO SURRENDER TO KINNOCK

Laura Williams examines the reasons behind the growing danger of a retreat from the fight for official recognition of Black Sections

needs of black people, Black Sections must be won to a programme of action not just a fight for their democratic right to exist. Only when Black Sections represent black workers in struggle will they be able to assert themselves from a position of strength.

Finally, in carrying out a fight against racism in the party and the racist policies of the party, Black Sections must declare themselves in favour of challenging the Kinnock leadership. Black Sections must make themselves relevant to the party as a whole. They cannot avoid taking a stand on all the struggles of the oppressed and the working class in general.

Such perspectives need to be agreed at the Black Sections conference. Any agreement must be binding on representatives of Black Sections. Having got thus far they must not be allowed to crawl off and surrender to Kinnock. Our action programme would place demands on these 'leaders'. Conference should elect a leadership based on implementing such an action programme.

● Build the campaign for

recognition of Black Sections, no retreat and no compromise with racist Labour leadership.

- Fight all of Labour's racist policies, take the struggles into the trade unions.
- Fight Tory racist attacks, Black Sections must campaign in the Black community, in the unions and in the Labour Party for:
- Fight the Tories' New Immigration Bill, no deportations, smash the immigration laws!
- Boycott all trade with South Africa!
- Scrap the Police and Criminal Evidence Act!
- Fight the cuts, privatisation, poll tax and anti-union laws!
- Fight for industrial action as the most effective way of winning these struggles!
- No platform for fascists, the black communities have a democratic right to protect themselves from the fascists and police. Build defence squads and fight for active labour movement support for black self-defence!



# THE TASKS OF THE DAY

by Workers Power health workers



# NHS WAY

Nupe and TUC leaders sabotage the 14th the danger of the health dispute being taken off the boil and then demobilised altogether is real.

Even at the level of a one day national strike, 14 March will leave the initiative in the hands of the bureaucracy. Unless we approach the day of action as a springboard for an all out strike we will be back where we were on 4 February.

All this means urgently organising the rank and file, to force the officials to act and to take control of the action out of their hands. We need a strike committee in every hospital, in every town and city and a national NHS strike committee.

Already these committees are being formed. In London and Leicester they exist on a city wide basis. The London committee—which represents twenty hospitals—has called for a national strike on 14 March. It has called for a national meeting of strike committees on Saturday 26 March. Every strike committee should send delegates to this meeting. A national conference of stewards and strike committee delegates can and must become the organising centre of the rank and file, the launching pad for an all out indefinite strike under rank and file control.

In 1982 it was six months into the dispute before militants organised a national stewards' conference. The current initiative must be used to full effect. But we cannot simply wait until 26 March and let the Nupe leadership sabotage the action planned for the 14th in the meantime. National coordination is vital in the fight for action on that day.

Instead of a good natured stroll through London, the 5 March demo should become the scene of a battle to force Nupe and the TUC to call for action on the 14th. Health workers should make sure the call for an all out strike is heard on ev-

Bernie Malone/Workers Power

**THE MAIN task facing all health workers today is to organise an all out, indefinite strike in the NHS. It is possible that protest action will force the Tories to settle on nurses' pay. It is even possible for hospital managers to back down on certain local issues when faced with local action.**

But unless we organise an all out national strike it will be impossible to force the Tories to provide the funds needed to solve the crisis in the NHS. Unless this happens, individual deals on nurses' pay, staffing levels, etc will be passed on by hospital managers in the form of cuts in patient care. The cash crisis will recur with ever more dire consequences.

Health workers mobilising for all out strike action have already come up against a major obstacle to organising such a strike—the union bureaucrats. Their strategy is based on firm opposition to an indefinite strike. How can we overcome their sabotage and inactivity?

First we need to unify the demands of health workers' action. The strike movement's current weakness arises from the bureaucrats ability to keep the issues separate, dividing one region, one section and each issue from another. To overcome this, in particular to overcome the attempt to divide nurses from ancillaries, we need a clear set of national

demands that links nurses' and ancillaries' pay to the question of cuts, waiting lists and privatisation. We need to centralise the struggle around a clear demand for a massive increase in NHS funds.

## Limited

Secondly, we need to confront the issue of emergency cover head-on. Reports from every picket line on 3 February show that management had forgotten nothing about the 1982 strike. Everywhere 'emergency cover' levels set by management were higher than normal levels. Hundreds of workers who had voted to strike were tied up on the wards or limited to dinner time protest. Later, during the south east day of action, Cohse sent workers at four hospitals back because staff shortages meant the emergency cover level applied to the whole workforce!

We should organise emergency cover only under workers' control. This is the only way to stop the management and union leaders using it to prevent strike action. Shop stewards/strike committees should set and monitor the levels of cover. If management refuse this type of cover we should be prepared to withdraw all cover. It is the bosses' responsibility to provide care, not the individual health worker.

In turn this means making picket lines effective. The first three hours of any strike day, and

all shift changes, should be devoted to stopping workers going in, arguing with RCN members and with members of unions not called out, to respect picket lines. Despite the RCN ballot call we need to step up the fight to persuade nurses to leave it. With or without a no strike clause it remains a bosses' union. The Nupe leadership, taking a lead from Labour's Robin Cook, has given up the fight to recruit from the RCN. They would like nothing better than to see Clay, and the numerous nurse managers who run the RCN, inside the TUC.

## Unity

This would be disastrous for the nurses in their struggle to defend their jobs and livelihoods. The RCN must be broken. This means winning RCN nurses to real trade unionism, transforming Nupe and Cohse from below, building unity with all sections as the basis for one union in the NHS.

Above all else it is vital that we break out of the potentially demoralising regional days of action. Since 3 February, the bureaucrats have organised a merry-go-round of regional protests. They were alarmed by the rank and file control on that day and were determined to reassert their own grip on their members. All of the Nupe and Cohse leaders have made it clear that they do not want another national day of strike action. They are terrified that such action could

## CANADIAN NURSES' VICTORY

**MORE THAN 10,000** nurses in the Canadian province of Alberta returned to work on 15 February after a hard-fought 19 day strike which has won key concessions from hospital management and the Tory provincial government.

The all-out action, which grabbed headlines from the winter olympics involved virtually all health-workers belonging to the United Nurses of Alberta (UNA). It was declared illegal at the outset under a provincial anti-union law banning strikes in 'essential services'.

During the course of the dispute, a judge found the nurses' union in contempt of court and levied a fine of \$250,000 (Canadian)—£114,000—against it. Dozens of nurses faced individual contempt proceedings and stiff fines just for participating in the strike. Following the end of the strike, another judge slapped a further £60,000 fine on the UNA, while more proceedings against individuals are pending. Victimized strikers have, however, won reinstatement so far.

Despite the legal intimidation and a media campaign attacking 'irresponsible' nurses for neglecting patients, the UNA membership stuck it out to achieve an eight per cent pay rise over the course of a 27 month long contract. This modest increase is a dramatic gain by contrast to

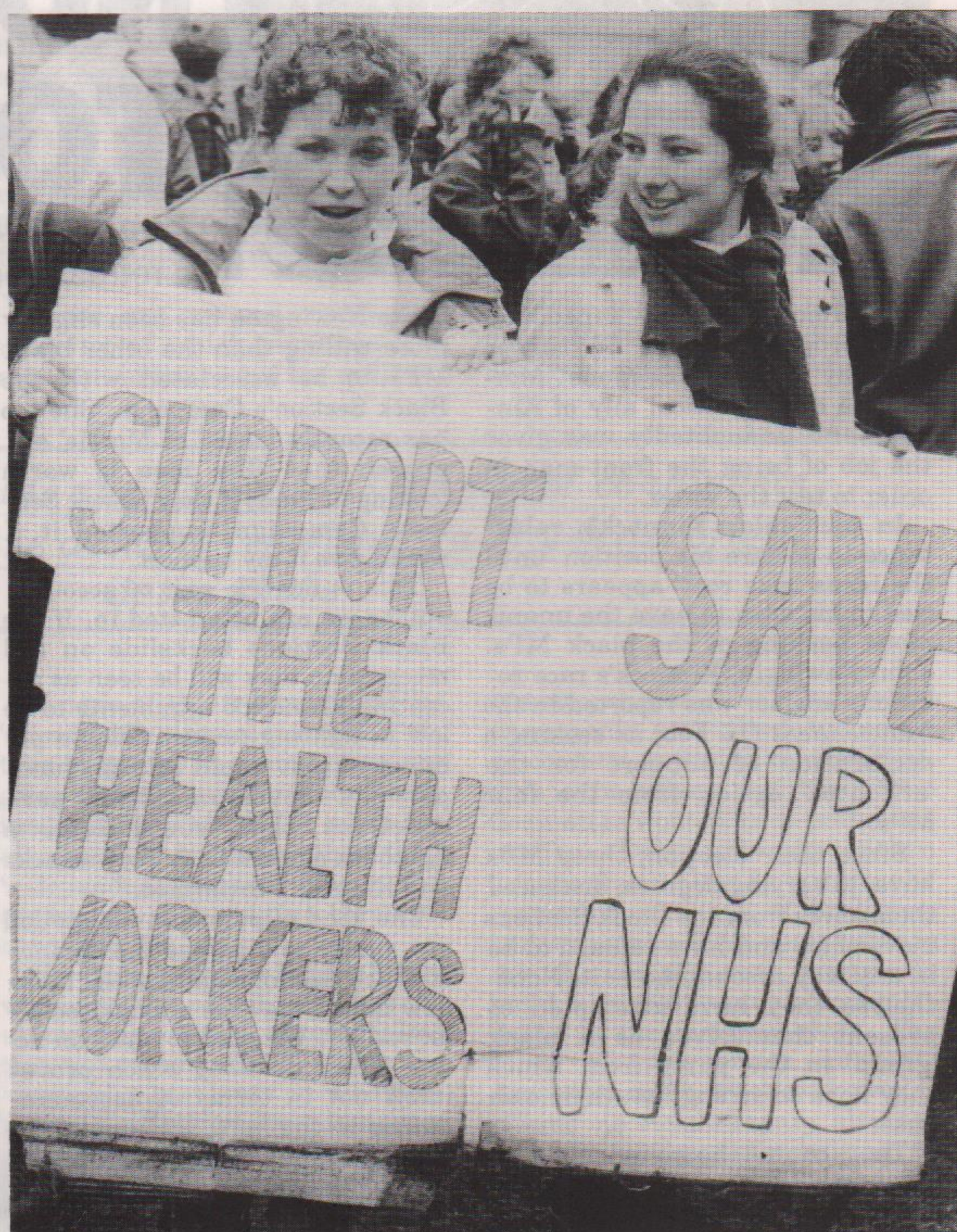
by G R McColl

the three per cent cut in wages initially demanded by the bosses' side, the Alberta Hospitals Association. The UNA's battle attracted widespread financial support from other trade unionists.

Canadian Tory Health Minister, Marv Moore (no relation to John) has done a U-turn in response to this pressure. He has promised an additional increase in spending to finance the nurses' pay deal. In the last two years real expenditure had been cut resulting in ward and bed closures and an effective pay freeze for nurses and other hospital workers.

The strike, though confined to Alberta, reflects a growing crisis in the whole Canadian health care system. It is largely based on public health insurance, financed both from general taxes and individual insurance paid by most workers. The details vary between provinces, but essentially the system is the same model of a 'slimmed-down' NHS advanced by Leon Brittan.

The valiant battle by Albertan nurses gives further proof that such a system is totally inadequate to the health care needs of workers. More importantly, it is an example to nurses and ancillaries in Britain that all-out industrial action is the way to win the fight for decent pay and conditions and to defend the NHS. ■



Bernie Malone/Workers Power





Chris Ramsey/Workers Power

## BLOC Socialist Worker

ONE SIDE effect of any period of sustained class struggle is that the bankrupt politics of the centrist left are transformed from literary errors in paper articles into practical mistakes, blunders and chicanery in living battles. The NHS dispute is no exception. Health workers looking to *Militant* or the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) for a lead have found no clear answers to the question, how to win?

The lessons of 1982, and the current dispute so far, show that one day actions are not enough to win the strike. *Militant* on the other hand have placed the whole weight of their agitation on calling on the TUC to organise a one day general strike for 14 March. Whilst we too call for this as a tactic to build all out action, for *Militant* it is a strategy. 'One day general strike to save the NHS' is their slogan. But a one day general strike will not save the NHS. It will not force the Tories to cough-up. It is the best form of protest, but protest is not enough. In union branches and strike committees *Militant* supporters have voted against calls for all out action, counterposing the one day general strike called by the TUC to the only action that can win.

Not only do *Militant* end up opposing all out action, they also refuse to organise rank and file workers to break with and fight against the bureaucracy. This was demonstrated at the Broad Left Organising Committee (BLOC) conference last month. Instead of turning the BLOC conference into a focal point for building an NHS rank and file movement, instead it was a stage managed rally which

## NO LEAD FOR HEALTH WORKERS

refused to take amendments to the platform resolution and allowed only hand picked *Militant* speakers from the floor. They issued the call for an NHS Broad Left, but their method of building it was shown in London on 22 February. At the same time as representatives of 20 hospitals met in the London Strike Co-ordinating Committee, *Militant* called a London BLOC meeting somewhere else. They are obliged to use the same heavy handed methods as in the LPYS because they fear the emergence of a real rank and file movement that would show up *Militant*-controlled Broad Lefts as election machines. The CPSA Broad Left, for example, have been (and is again) in control of the National Executive yet has consistently run away from all out action to beat the bosses.

The SWP meanwhile are clear that an all out strike is needed. In an article on the lessons of 1982 Duncan Blackie writes: 'Unless the selective action is used as a springboard for all out action, the anger and willingness to fight could be wasted once again.'

Correct. But where is this translated into a call or fight for all out action by the SWP? Not in the pages of *Socialist Worker*, nor in the resolutions they are putting to strike committees. Trapped in their usual dilemma—between arguing for what is needed and arguing for what they think might be possible to win amongst workers—the SWP and its members in the NHS cannot bring themselves to call for all out action. In both Leicester and London, the SWP has opposed strike committees taking a clear position in favour of

an all out strike. It is the same logic that meant SWP members deriding strike action in the NHS as 'abstract' in December. In the minds of the SWP leaders all future action—from all out strikes to general strikes and insurrection—always remain 'abstract' until workers start to undertake them. Only then will the SWP call for such actions. This is not revolutionary leadership. It is an abdication of such leadership. As Lenin said about the Russian 'Economists', who feared their own demands might be too far ahead of workers' spontaneous demands: 'Are they not confusing "vanguard" with "rearguard"?'

The SWP has entered the NHS dispute just as it exited from the 1982 strike, with the refrain that building rank and file movements is impossible. Despite this strategic understanding, the actual existence of strike committees in several areas has forced them to raise the call for them. But faced with a resolution to the London Strike Committee calling for a national meeting, SWP members objected, saying it wasn't a priority. With Nupe sabotaging the one day action—let alone an all out strike—they think an organised challenge to the bureaucracy is not a priority!

Revolutionaries have to say what is necessary. No revolutionary who has experienced the series of defeats of the 1980s could object to the call for all out action and national rank and file control. But health workers will not find these demands concretely posed and activity fought for in the current agitation of *Militant* and *Socialist Worker*. ■

# THE TO WIN

ery section of the demo and from the platform. At the same time we need to organise a meeting on 5 March of strike committees represented on the demo.

## Bombard

The strike committees nationally and locally should organise to bombard the health union national executive and conferences with emergency resolutions calling—in watertight language—for an all out NHS strike. At the same time we need to build on the action on 14 March to force the bureaucrats to fight. Everywhere, NHS workers on strike should hold mass meetings, not to hear local MPs and regional officers, but to discuss the issue of immediate indefinite strike action.

Strike committees need to organise delegations to other hospitals not yet committed to action, and to factories and offices to demand support on 14 March. And the national strike committee must be built.

Also, every strike committee should commit itself to the aim of an all out strike. The first representative national meeting of strike committees should issue a call and name the day for that strike.

Workers Power members and supporters in the NHS grouped around the bulletin *Red Pulse* are already at the forefront of the fight for an all out strike. Health workers who want a clear strategy to win should join us. ■

## HOW TO DEFEND THE NHS

**MILLIONS OF workers throughout the country are angry about the NHS. Their anger is, without a shadow of a doubt, directed against the Tories. Their deliberate vandalism inside the NHS has provoked active resistance from health workers and other trade unionists.**

This anger could be mobilised as part of a united anti-Tory offensive. Yet the bureaucrats who lead the Labour Party and the unions are doing everything they can to prevent this from happening. They are terrified of the health dispute developing into generalised industrial action and are trying to divert it into a toothless protest campaign. To understand the dangers and to combat the politics of the bureaucrats we need clear answers to the question 'how and why do we defend the NHS?'

The NHS provides free health care at the point of need. Its formation in 1947 abolished workers' dependence on private medicine for basic health care. As such the NHS was a reform conceded by the capitalists as a 'necessary evil'.

It was necessary for the bosses in two ways. First, funding health care from a tax on profits was the cheapest way of meeting the bosses' needs for a healthy workforce. The loss is necessary to keep the profit system going as a whole.

But the NHS was also necessary as part of the price the bosses paid for social peace in the immediate post-war period. By linking health care, however inadequately, to workers' needs the bosses had conceded more than was necessary just to maintain the workforce. This concession is what constitutes a gain for all workers and it is

what we defend in the NHS.

As new technology and an ageing population have increased demand on NHS funds, the capitalists have been driving to restore profits. This has led to a sustained attack in the form of the slow strangulation of NHS funds, begun by Labour in 1976 and continued by Thatcher.

Whilst it is true that Thatcher has increased NHS funds by 0.5% a year in real terms, it needs a 3% increase annually to stand still. These are just figures, but the result of this arithmetic is the needless death of sick children, the needless suffering of the 688,000 people on waiting lists, and the needless closure of beds, wards and operating theatres. In December, as the funding crisis bit deeper than ever, even sections of the ruling class began to protest. The consultants, the Tory wets and the RCN leaders piped up with polite requests for more money. While the voice of the trade union leaders was notably absent from this chorus, they were silently ecstatic about the emergence of ruling class opposition to NHS cuts.

Since then Sawyer, Bickerstaffe, MacKenzie etc. have built an entire strategy for defending the NHS around the idea of an alliance with the Tory dissenters. Nupe in particular have been the loudest in calling for a popular front to defend the NHS. Tony Martin, a North West Nupe official, appealed to disgruntled consultants and Tories to take a stand against Thatcher when he said: 'The government is cocking a snook at NHS employees, health professionals, community health councils and even many Tories.'

Not many Tories or 'health professionals' were on the rally he was addressing. They were too busy

demouncing the North West day of action on television and in the press!

At a rally in Sandwell later in February, Roger Poole, a Nupe national organiser appealed to people 'right across the political spectrum' to join 'a coalition of forces so great that Thatcher will be prevented from dismantling the NHS.' This strategy, a cross-class alliance of passive protest and appeals to public opinion, is a dead end for workers who want to defend the NHS. To keep their fair weather Tory allies the union leaders must sabotage independent workers action wherever it raises its head. Once the health workers had entered the struggle with strike action, first in Manchester, then on 3 February, the consultants, Tory MPs and RCN leaders changed their tune, roundly condemning strike action.

Yet strike action by NHS workers is the key to defending the NHS. NHS workers' pay, shift patterns, staffing levels etc are all under attack because of the onslaught on funding. NHS workers need to link their struggles, at present sectional and sporadic, to the fight for funding that will meet:

- The Nurses claim in full
  - Abolition of low pay in the NHS through a national minimum wage,
  - Reverse all cuts and privatisation,
  - Abolish waiting lists.
- These are demands absolutely indispensable for linking health workers' struggles over pay and conditions to the defence of the NHS. But in turn they pose questions the bureaucrats and Labour politicians dare not answer: where will the money come from and how should it be allocated?

Only health workers know the full extent of the cuts and how much is needed to reverse them. That is why the fight for workers' control in the NHS is central to defending it. This means committees of workers exercising a day-to-day veto over all management decisions, having the final say in staffing levels, pay, hours and the allocation of resources; deciding themselves the amount of money required to meet the needs of patients.

An NHS that was transformed to really meet workers' needs would require billions more than the current NHS budget. Unlike the Labour and union leaders we do not think the answer is a few pence on taxes. The money should come directly from the pockets of the rich.

The drug and supply companies who cream off millions every year from the NHS should be nationalised without compensation. So should the banks and finance houses who leech money from the NHS and all public services. The private sector in health should be abolished altogether.

The Labour and Trade Union leaders fear this strategy like the plague, because it recognises that in the present period defending gains won from capitalism necessitates attacking the profit system as a whole.

The fight to save the NHS has begun in earnest, despite the inaction and sabotage of the union leaders. But the key to winning this fight is mobilising health workers' action that links their own claims to the defence of free health care. That means busting up the bureaucrats' cross-class alliance with an all out strike in the NHS. ■

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# NATIONAL STRUGGLE ROCKS KREMLIN

There have been widespread strikes and demonstrations in Soviet Armenia close to the border of Turkey and the USSR. Clashes between Azerbaijani and Armenian peoples in the Caucasus have been reported. *John Hunt* examines the roots of the present crisis and its significance for the Soviet working class

**THE LAST** week of February saw a massive wave of demonstrations and strikes in Soviet Armenia. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets demanding that the autonomous region of Nagorny Karabakh join the Armenian republic and be allowed to secede from the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan.

An unofficial Organising Committee for the Demonstrations took control of massive orderly demonstrations in the Republic's capital Yerevan. Up to a million of the Republic's three million population were reported to have taken to the streets.

This mass revolt is but the latest evidence that Gorbachev's drive for reform is serving, despite itself, to unleash a tide of nationalist struggles inside the Soviet Union. By pitting the central apparatus against corrupt local officials and by summoning initiative 'from be-

low' Gorbachev's *perestroika* is having a contradictory and destabilising influence on the bureaucracy's rule.

Marx used to refer to the pre-revolutionary Russian Empire as a 'prison house of nations'. That description holds good for the present day Soviet Union. The central Soviet state apparatus is tightly dominated by Great Russians. An official Russification policy means that in the Baltic Republics of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia an increasing proportion of the population is Russian. So too in the Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Key party and KGB posts in the non-Russian republics are in the hands of Russians. And all of this despite the fact that Russians make up only just over 50% of the Soviet population.

No wonder then that simmering opposition to Moscow rule has

burst to the surface once again under Gorbachev. It reflects, in part, a genuine popular response to national oppression within the USSR. This has been reflected in demonstrations throughout the Baltic Republics, in riots in Kazakhstan in 1986. It was expressed in demonstrations in Moscow and Tashkent by the Crimean Tartars who were deported, as an entire people, from their homeland by Stalin. Now it has boiled over in Armenia.

There is, however, another important element in the present Soviet nationalities crisis. A dog-fight is taking place within the Soviet bureaucracy. The central axis of the Kremlin bureaucracy is trying to clean out corruption and gross inefficiency in the lower levels of their own ranks.

To that end they are even officially encouraging the indepen-

dence of local soviets and party organisations. And they are officially pointing the finger at corrupt practices in the republican leaderships. The Soviet press has been conducting a campaign in the last months against the Kiev organisation of the Ukrainian party boss, Shcherbitsky. It has also denounced the flagrant corruption of the Armenian party which has been headed by Demirchyan.

Gorbachev is doubtless trying to oust Demirchyan. Only last month the Soviet press was praising two fearless members of the Armenian party who were howled down at a party meeting for denouncing corruption. That kind of *glasnost* must have been sanctioned from the very top of the party. The Armenian party leadership was obviously under considerable pressure and may even have attempted to play the nationalist card in its defence.

The immediate issue that sparked the demonstrations concerns the region of Nagorny Karabakh which is part of neighbouring Soviet Azerbaijan. 75% of its population are Armenian and, taking a cue from Gorbachev's call for democratisation, its local council recently voted to join Soviet Armenia. Its party organisation sacked its Russian chief Kevorkov for 'shortcomings' and replaced him with an Armenian, Pogosyan.

Demonstrations in support of Nagorny Karabakh joining Armenia were reported as long ago as last October. Mass demonstrations numbering up to 250,000 erupted in February and their continuation for at least a week shows that the local party and police were incapable of stopping them. Demirchyan's appeals for order were howled down in Yerevan's central square. A strike wave gripped the city.

## Appeal

Events reached such proportions that four leading Party officials were rushed to Armenia carrying an appeal from Gorbachev for a 'calm discussion of ideas and proposals'.

Gorbachev may well be able to use the crisis to oust Demirchyan. It will prove a more difficult task to restore order amongst the Armenian masses. Gorbachev has promised to refer the matter to a future Central Committee plenum on the nationalities question. But that is unlikely to satisfy the demonstrators. Hence the very real prospect that the Soviet bureaucracy will have to crush the revolt with the paratroops and police it has flown in from outside.

Reports talk of Yerevan being in the grip of an intoxicating mass political debate with the local troops and police reluctant to intervene. The power of the bureaucracy has temporarily broken down in Armenia. The key question is whether, in that breakdown, the Armenian workers can voice their national grievances in internationalist terms and whether they can turn their struggle into an offensive for working class power.

No socialist can tolerate any form of national oppression whatsoever. The citizens of Nagorny Karabakh should have the right, should they so wish, to join Soviet Armenia. Similarly, we support the right of the Soviet republics to be free of the political and cultural oppression of the Great Russian central bureaucracy, and support struggles to that end. But our support for national struggles in the USSR is conditional on the defence

of the economic gains of October 1917; state ownership, the monopoly of foreign trade and planned production. The struggle for workers' power in the USSR is directed at freeing these gains from the grip of the bureaucracy.

Nationalism in the USSR poses very many real dangers for those struggling for political power for the Soviet working class against the bureaucracy. Nationalism is deep rooted as a result of the very nature of the old Russian Empire and today's USSR. The Armenians in the USSR were originally annexed from Persia by the Tsars in the 1820s. As Christians they initially welcomed this release from the 'Muslim yoke' and did not suffer the pogroms and brutality of the majority of Armenians who were left in the Turkish Empire. The most active Armenian democrats concentrated their energies on freeing the Armenians in Turkey.

In the early 20th century Nicholas II ended the honeymoon between the Armenians and the Russian state. He ordered the Russification of Armenian schools. And, hoping to improve relations with Turkey, he authorised the pogroming of the Armenians—the 'Jews of the Caucasus'. In particular the regime encouraged strife between the Muslim Azerbaijanis and the Armenians as a means of maintaining its rule at the expense of the Armenians. This was particularly encouraged in the revolutionary year of 1905.

## Disaster

Any rekindling of anti-Azerbaijani chauvinism would be a disaster for the workers of the Caucasus and the entire USSR. It would buttress, rather than undermine, the power of the central bureaucracy. The republican bureaucracies must no more be allowed to fan the flames of national rivalry than must the central bureaucracy be allowed to impose its Russian appointees and cultural policies. That way lies the road of diverting the energy of the masses away from fighting their real enemy. The working class must not line up behind their national bureaucracies—deeply corrupt and repressive as they all are—in order to resist the central state apparatus. They must organise their independent struggle against both.

As isolated units the minority nationalities of the USSR can be picked off one by one. In the main, they are too small to withstand that fate. Here is another reason why nationalism in the USSR paves the way for defeat at the hands of the central bureaucracy.

The Armenian crisis is a further test for Gorbachev. His conservative critics will take it as yet more proof of the need to crack down hard and return to the old ways. If the Armenians win concessions other sections of Soviet society will take a leaf from their book. What is vital is that those who are fighting bureaucratic rule are offered an alternative path to their liberation to that of the various nationalisms that are strengthening their hold in the USSR. That path can only be the struggle for power of the entire Soviet working class guaranteeing to put an end to national oppression for ever. In pursuit of that end the Armenian workers must reforge their own soviets, formulate their own class demands and organise to fight for them. That would be a path that the entire Soviet working class could follow. ■

## GORBACHEV BOWS TO IMPERIALISM



Imperialist backed rebels prepare for a victory, courtesy of the Kremlin

THE SOVIET Union's announced departure from Afghanistan has prompted bourgeois journalists to hail the coming of Russia's Vietnam. In fact the USSR's exit from Afghanistan—if it comes—and the American retreat from Saigon are very different.

The Soviet Union has not been defeated by a triumphant national uprising as was the USA in Vietnam. It has in fact caved in to the major imperialist powers who have made continued resistance possible.

With its own security interests at heart the USSR entered Afghanistan to shore up the PDPA regime in the Afghan civil war.

Against the PDPA stood a motley, and deeply divided, series of opposition groups with arms and equipment ferried from the west, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. By 1986 there was more and more evidence that the rebels were losing.

In that situation Britain and the USA moved to boost the fire power of the rebels. In late 1985 British intelligence and the CIA arranged the shipment of 600 blowpipe missiles to the Islamic Fundamentalist Hizb-i-Islami. In 1986 the USA started to supply Stinger missiles to the same group as well as to the Jamiat-i-Islami fundamentalists.

Faced with this upping of the stakes the Soviet bureaucracy took fright. They increasingly pressured their Afghan allies to deal with the rebels and backtrack on reform. Now they seem poised to leave the PDPA in the lurch.

If the Soviet bureaucracy are to be believed they will start to withdraw their troops on 15 May with half of the 115,000 contingent leaving within three months. The only condition they set is that the 15 March Geneva Conference sanctions a UN commitment to non-interference in Afghanistan. Gone are any commitments to maintaining any form of PDPA rule. Gorbachev has gone so far as to say that the nature of the future Afghanistan government is 'none of our business'.

Gorbachev may think its none of his business who rules Afghanistan and how. The USA and Britain see things very differently. They have provided the hardware for the Islamic fundamentalists who are committed to a continued *Jihad* against the PDPA and its supporters. The USA has agreed to stop aiding the Mujahedin only sixty days after the withdrawal begins. They will stoke the fires of bloody civil war on behalf of reaction.

The Islamic fundamentalists are opposed to any compromise with the PDPA. Many are even opposed to sharing power with King Zahir Shah and Afghan exiles in the West. What their plans for women in particular would entail was shown by a recent report of the Munda 6 refugee camp near Peshawar. In this camp of tents women must be permanently veiled and are not allowed to leave the confines of their hovels. The imperialist backed reactionaries would set Afghanistan even further back towards the dark ages.

The future looks bleak for those progressive forces in Afghanistan committed to resisting imperialism and modernising their society. Some will get safe passages to the USSR. Most will be left to bear the full force of reaction.

It is US imperialism in particular that has paved the way for an Afghan blood bath. And the Soviet bureaucracy now seems set to serve as its willing accomplice. Let this be a warning to those who take the Soviet Union's commitment to progressive causes and regimes as good coin. The Kremlin will sell their struggles and their lives if, in doing so, it strengthens its bonds with the imperialists. Woe betide Kampuchea, Nicaragua, Angola and Mozambique. ■



# DRIVE WALDHEIM FROM OFFICE!

Waldheim's Nazi past has caught up with him. Keith Hassell looks at the political crisis and the opportunity for workers' action that have opened up as a result



On 12 March Austria will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Anschluss, when Hitler spoke in the Heldenplatz in Vienna to announce that Germany had annexed Austria. Or will it?

The current political scandal that surrounds the President of the Austrian Republic, Kurt Waldheim, has revealed that Austria's ruling and middle classes greeted Hitler with open arms. The carefully constructed public relations image of Austria as a victim of German imperialism has been destroyed by the Waldheim affair.

Through his hasty entry into the National Socialist (Nazi) Student movement in the late 1930s Waldheim was just in time to take part in the celebration in the Heldenplatz. During the war he was a staff officer in the Wehrmacht. He was a diligent officer, whether acting in the rear helping to deport Jews or liquidating partisans in the Kozara mountains of Yugoslavia. There were many like Waldheim who, with the aid of social democracy at the head of the Second Republic after 1945, were helped to disappear abroad or hide within the bloated state and party apparatuses of Austria. Few, if any, have become so prominent as Waldheim. He was twice elected United Nations Secretary General and, in June 1986, voted President of the Republic of Austria.

The rumblings about his past were under way at the time of the presidential elections. But these revelations about his past at first only served to increase support for Waldheim among the mass of the Austrian petit bourgeoisie and even a section of workers. This support indicated just how deep anti-semitism was in Austria and how sympathetic they were to Waldheim who had just 'done his duty by his country'.

Support began to desert Waldheim only when his selective memory about his past turned to evidence of bare-faced lying about his record. The last months of 1987 and this year have seen Waldheim increasingly isolated within his own class. Indeed, the main representatives of the industrial bourgeoisie have said Waldheim must go, leaving the agricultural capitalists who back the OVP still defending Waldheim. The mounting opposition within the ranks of the bourgeoisie finally emboldened the Austrian Socialist Party (SPO) Chancellor Vranitzky to publicly challenge the President to resign.

Waldheim's isolation is not that hard to explain. The post of Presi-

dent has two real functions. It must, in the first place, be occupied by a respected international statesman, a person whose standing in the international diplomatic community is unimpeachable. Especially at a time when the Austrian bourgeoisie envisage a period ahead of delicate negotiations concerning entry into the EEC Waldheim's presence is a source of embarrassment. But a President is also a potential Bonaparte, someone who can, in time of acute social crises, throw dust in the eyes of the working class; someone who can divert the workers' attack on, or alienation from, the normal institutions of bourgeois democracy by using all his powers to rescue the situation for the ruling class. These powers are considerable but to be effective the President needs to be a person in whom the masses will believe when he raises himself above the 'squabbling classes' and announces 'I am Austria'. Waldheim has lost this credibility.

But how to be rid of a President who does not wish to go? This is the crisis that now faces the Austrian ruling circles. Constitutionally they could try and secure a two-thirds majority in Parliament calling on him to resign and then put it to a referendum of the Austrian people. But this would be to drag the matter out for months to come, to provoke a public debate and open up the fascist wounds that Austrian democratic cosmetics have done so much to hide.

It would be a mistake to conclude that this scandal just represents a fall-out between sections of the Austrian bourgeoisie and as such has no interest for the working class. Every crisis of the bourgeoisie presents an opportunity for the working class to drive a wedge into the camp of its enemies.

The spontaneous sentiment of the vanguard elements in the workers' movement is to follow the SPO in seeing Waldheim's presence as an insult to the reputation of Austria. The task of revolutionaries is to break the working class from this slavish attitude and develop an independent and militant opposition to Waldheim that makes it difficult for the SPO to continue its popular front on this and other issues with its government partners, the OVP.

At the moment while it is actively discussing the question the working class is not in active opposition. The demonstrations, such as the 4,000 strong march in Vienna on 21 February, are predominantly of the far left and the Green movement. But the working class

must want to drive Waldheim from office. During his election campaign and ever more so in office, Waldheim has become an open exponent of the most reactionary wing of the bourgeoisie. The OVP and the neo-fascist FVO are his backers. If Waldheim can be forced out of office against their will then it will be a blow to the coalition of austerity politicians and provincial anti-semites. Failure to strike this blow will give confidence to these forces to launch further offensives against the working class.

Even more importantly, Waldheim's defeat could bring to the surface all the contradictions latent within the SPO-OVP coalition government. The Austrian bourgeoisie want to maintain this government to oversee the present austerity package against the nationalised industries, education, social welfare and system of progressive taxation. An active orientation of the working class is essential to put pressure on the SPO to force Waldheim out. It must stop the collusion of the SPO with the OVP in an agreement to allow the OVP to choose a candidate to replace Waldheim in further elections. It must put an end to the situation whereby Waldheim can be allowed to be President of last year's OGB (the Austrian TUC) Congress.

The pamphlet of *Arbeiter Standpunkt* (Austrian section of the MRCI) sold on the recent anti-Waldheim demonstrations maps out the tasks ahead:

'The SPO especially needs the coalition as an excuse for its austerity programme aimed at its own party rank and file and the electorate. It attacks Waldheim half-heartedly from an "all-nation" standpoint without using any serious political or moral arguments against his further Presidency. All these internal contradictions of the already unstable coalition of the social democratic reformists with the bourgeoisie would become obvious through a mass campaign for the fall of Waldheim. It could even come to a break with the coalition and new elections...'

50,000 people of all the layers of the working population demonstrated on 24 October 1987 against social cuts and austerity policies. This protest must be restarted and carried further. It must be extended to a general mobilisation for the fall of Waldheim... 12 March, instead of letting it become a festivity of official state loyalty, of official state hypocrisy and final abolition of the fascist past, is the first decisive date on which such a movement must prove itself. ■

## BOTHA'S NEW CRACKDOWN

AT THE end of February the apartheid regime in South Africa launched on a new wave of repression against anti-apartheid organisations. Botha has introduced a series of measures which while not actually making the organisations illegal, as is the case with the ANC and the South African Communist Party, prohibits them 'from carrying on, or performing, any activities or acts whatsoever'. In other words these organisations can exist but they are banned from doing anything—campaigning, publishing, holding meetings etc.

The ban covers the biggest anti-apartheid organisation—the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Azanian Peoples Organisation, and a number of organisations—like the Soweto Civic Association and campaigns for the release of prisoners—such as the Release Mandela Campaign.

A special clause in the order deals with Cosatu, the largest trade union organisation in South Africa. It is banned from any activity which is deemed 'political'. It is specifically prevented from campaigning for the release of its imprisoned members,

such as Moses Mayekiso, leader of the Metal Workers Union on trial for 'treason'. It is banned from commemorating the anniversary of any 'incident, riot or unrest' in South Africa.

The purpose of these draconian measures is to complete the job of suppression started with the imposition of the State of Emergency in June 1986. Coupled with the imposition of a new series of banning orders against leading anti-apartheid activists it is a deliberate blow against the remaining 'legal opposition' to the apartheid regime.

It is also aimed at strengthening the hold of the organisations willing to collaborate with apartheid such as Buthelezi's Inkatha movement which was, of course, left untouched by these measures. Indeed many of those put under banning orders were UDF members involved in attempting to put an end to the murderous warfare carried out in Pietermaritzburg by Inkatha's thugs. Nothing is to be allowed to prevent Botha's stooges from gaining victory over the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

These moves severely embarrassed

both Thatcher and Reagan, Botha's staunchest allies. They had been trying to project an image of an embattled South African government introducing cautious reform. Indeed the latest crack down, combined with the growing intervention by South African troops against the Angolan government, indicates the increasing strength of the hardliners around the Minister of Defence General Magnus Malan.

The latest attempts to break the resistance movement in South Africa makes it even more important to demand that the British trade union and labour movement takes up the campaign for workers' sanctions against the South African regime. Now that it has become virtually impossible to campaign for the release of imprisoned trade unionists and anti-apartheid activists inside South Africa it is even more vital to get the trade union movement to take up its responsibilities to campaign vigorously for their release.

- Release all political prisoners!
- Down with the State of Emergency!
- Smash the apartheid regime!
- Workers sanctions now!

## LSE BREAKS APARTHEID LINKS

ON 23 FEBRUARY, the London School of Economics became the first British university to divest itself of all shareholdings in South African linked corporations. The final decision came almost a year to the day after the start of a week-long occupation of the college's main administration block by more than 300 students.

The divestment marked a major climbdown by the LSE's Court of Governors. For the past decade the Court, which includes such prominent British bosses and bankers as Sir John Sparrow (Morgan Grenfell), Sir Terence Beckett (ex-CBI president) and Lord Weinstock (GEC), had resisted numerous Student Union campaigns to put an end to the LSE's lucrative links with apartheid.

In the end the combined effects of last year's occupation and the threat of further direct action led the school authorities to sell an estimated £3 million worth of shares in 23 companies including Shell, BP, BTR and the Midland Bank.

The victory, at the LSE highlights the possibilities of mobilising students on South Africa

around the question of divestment. The emphasis in these campaigns must be to bring home to students and campus workers how imperialism and its institutions profit from, and prop up, the apartheid system.

It should be clear that divestment alone only changes the individuals or corporation who benefit from the super-exploitation of black workers in South Africa. We must fight for a campaign which uses this issue to mobilise students in mass action against the entire collaboration of British imperialism with the apartheid system and for the necessity of workers' sanctions against South Africa.

It is on this basis that anti-apartheid activists in the colleges now need to seize upon the LSE example and place maximum pressure from below on the NUS leadership for a nationally co-ordinated campaign that uses occupations and seeks solidarity from campus trade unions to force the sale of £100 million worth of investments in multi-nationals profiting from the brutality of apartheid capitalism. ■



# THE REAL FACE OF BRITISH JUSTICE

by Breda Concannon

ON SUNDAY 21 February Aiden McAneaspie was shot dead by a British soldier at an army road block in Aughnacloy in Northern Ireland. In the following week, Ian Thain, the only soldier ever sentenced for murder in Northern Ireland was back on duty in the army after less than three years in jail.

Both of these events indicate the total contempt the British army has for the nationalist population. They confirm once again that killing unarmed republicans is official British policy.

In the aftermath of the Attorney General's refusal to prosecute in the RUC shoot-to-kill inquiry and of the Stalker revelations the Tories are more determined than ever to carry on with this policy. They aim to bolster the right of the army and RUC to oppress, harass, intimidate, murder and frame anyone who is a threat to their strategic goal of smashing all nationalist resistance to British rule in Ireland.

If this requires the use of MI5 'moles', SAS assassination squads and RUC killers in uniform then so be it. Since 1969 270 people have been killed by the 'security forces'. Only 20 members of the army or the RUC have been prosecuted for these murders. Of these only one has been convicted of murder (Ian Thain) and one of manslaughter. This is an acquittal rate of 90%—not bad for British justice!

The Tories are even prepared to frame and vilify a Deputy Chief Constable (Stalker) who stepped out of line. For them this is a small price to pay to ensure that the real nature of the Northern Irish state is kept hidden under the blood stained carpet.

The Tories are now going on the offensive. Their plans include the replacement of the 'temporary' provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) with a permanent piece of legislation. In 1974 when it was first introduced in the aftermath of the Birmingham bombings, the PTA was referred to by the then Labour Home Secre-

tary Roy Jenkins as a law that was 'draconian and unprecedented in peacetime'. Fourteen years later the repression carried out under the PTA is common practice.

The PTA provides the legal pretext for the state to continue to harass, intimidate and, all too often, frame members of the Irish community in Britain who show any form of solidarity with the struggle for a united Ireland.

The Birmingham Six, the Maguire family and the Guildford Four—all of whom have clear evidence of police frame-ups were arrested and interrogated under the PTA. Last year 225 people were detained under its provisions—only 25 were subsequently charged. In the face of the Tories' rigged justice system and the PTA becoming permanent, the labour and trade union movement must act.

The revelations of the past few weeks must not be forgotten. They must be published throughout the labour movement. What must be remembered, however, is that such events are not 'the excesses of a

few' but are what the British army was sent in to do. They are examples of what British rule in Northern Ireland really means.

As long as the troops remain in the six counties and prop up the sectarian forces of the RUC and the loyalist gangs, there will be countless cases of murder, repression and intimidation of the nationalist population. And British 'justice' will sanctify every act of repression.

Workers' anger must be directed, not simply against the individuals who carry out a specific atrocity, but at the real culprit—British imperialism and its bloody rule in Ireland.

We must fight for:

- Repeal of the PTA!
- Disbanding of the RUC!
- Troops out now!
- Self-determination for the whole of the Irish people!

**THE OUTRAGE and indignation of Southern Irish bourgeois politicians over the Stalker affair and the Birmingham Six appeal is sheer hypocrisy. It is a face saving exercise to cover their embarrassment and indignation at not being consulted by the British government.**

**The reality is that the Anglo Irish Agreement remains intact and cross-border co-operation between the Gardai and the RUC is still in force and by all accounts being strengthened. Recent reports suggest that the Gardai have been in discussions with the RUC about the possible establishment of an anti-terrorist squad along the lines of the mobile support unit. The very unit that was at the centre of the 'shoot to kill' affair.**

**Once again it has been vividly demonstrated that a key element of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is increased powers of repression against the IRA and any anti-unionists who defend them.**



British 'justice' ensured that six men framed by the police stayed in jail. Irish people in the South took to the streets in protest at this latest example of British

Dereck Speirs/Report

## Obstacles and illusions

Comrades, In recent articles on the health dispute, *Workers Power* has rightly pointed to the need for nurses to cast off the illusions of 'professionalism' and realise their true position of highly exploited wage workers. Clearly the main obstacle to this is the continued existence of the RCN with its no-strike clause.

No doubt many nurses in the RCN see the term 'professional' as describing their dedication to the job of looking after people. However, if this dedication means they are willing to take no effective action against cuts in pay, worsening conditions and hospital closures—still worse, to sabotage the action taken by other nurses, then this 'professionalism' must be called by its right name: *scabbing!*

Many nurses in the RCN are clearly showing recognition of this by either leaving it or calling for the abandonment of the no-strike clause. In Coventry recently, RCN members have claimed to be 'supporting' strike action by other nurses by maintaining emergency cover. But such emergency cover must be under the control of the rank and file militants taking action, not by the management who often use it to extract even more work for less pay!

*Workers Power* has argued for RCN nurses to be 'encouraged to join either Cohse or Nupe'. This is not enough. For the present campaign to save the NHS to be successful, the RCN has to be smashed and its leaders banished into the ranks of management where they belong. Rank and file RCN nurses must be won to not just 'either Cohse or Nupe' but to a union under rank and file control which represents all NHS workers.

Militants must build on joint union action already being taken to actively campaign for such an 'industrial-type' union. Nor should such a campaign merely be seen as a long-term goal. On the contrary, it is vitally important now in gaining the effective all-out indefinite strike action necessary to win—action which is so vehemently opposed by the leaderships of both the RCN and the other NHS unions.

Yours,  
Ian Hill

☛ *The existence of the RCN is undoubtedly a major obstacle to all out action in the NHS. But then, as the comrade points out, so too is the leadership of both Cohse and Nupe. The argument with the RCN rank and file cannot be won simply by calling their members who worked during days of action 'scabs'. The fact is that most striking nurses did not challenge cover being provided by Cohse and Nupe nurses, as well as RCN members, under management control. Cohse and Nupe are shackled by the TUC's 'code of conduct', which finds no place for rank*



write to:  
Workers Power  
BM Box 7750  
London WC1 3XX

*and file control of all-out strike action as well as of emergency cover. The most immediate problem is not RCN 'scabbing' but the need for all out action rather than protest strikes.*

## IN DEFENCE OF SYNDICALISM?

Comrades, Your position on the IWW still won't wash. Daniel De Leon left it in 1908 only three years after its foundation. Though the Western Federation of Miners, which had only briefly turned to revolutionary unionism, and was never fully integrated into the One Big Union, had left the IWW the year before, the real growth of the IWW was to come well after De Leon's departure. So in no way did it decline under his influence.

Haywood never belonged to the small syndicalist minority of the IWW. He—like Debs—was a member of the industrial unionist wing of the Socialist Party of America (SPA) though he stood to the left of Debs. He was expelled from the SPA, and rejoined to form the left wing, which fathered the CP. He became highly

disillusioned with the centralism and bureaucracy of the Lenin regime, and contacted syndicalists who attended the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU); and it was in large part on the basis of his information that the latter broke from the RILU and relaunched the AIT/IWMA.

With all due respect to Dave Douglas, syndicalists are opposed to all states and all governments. The standard Leninist claim—which you parrot—that we, in some way, underrate the evils of the state, is, from a movement which wishes to keep the state, just dishonest.

Fraternally,  
Laurens Otter.

☛ In the three years that De Leon was in the IWW his sectarian politics did lead to a decline in the organisation's size and influence. De Leon attempted to impose a party structure on a union organisation. In doing so he alienated a whole number of unionists who disagreed with his politics.

On Haywood himself, comrade Otter, like comrades Lewis and Douglas before him, misses the point. Despite Haywood's participation in the SPA, and later the CP, the man was a consistent syndicalist in that he believed in the primacy of industrial organisation over political organisation as a means of securing both industrial and political change.

As for his 'disillusionment' with the 'Lenin regime', comrade Otter might like to furnish us with some evidence. As far as we know, this assertion has no foundation in fact.

Finally, with all due respect, come off it comrade! Every Marxist knows that 'the state' is not an unchanging entity. The workers' state that we seek to construct has a totally different class character and

function to the capitalist state that Bill was hounded by. The capitalist state, cannot be killed by curses. Syndicalists may not underrate the 'evils' of the capitalist state—but they certainly have no strategy capable of defeating it.

## SSiN again

Dear Comrades, In the last paper (WP102) Comrade M Goldenberg questioned the article on NUS Conference (WP101). In the letter the comrade argued that resolutions passed at conference were soft on the leadership of the NUS, not because of the political domination of NUS by Nols and the CP, but because SSiN motions contained no demands on the National Executive Council for specific action. The comrade is right with respect to some of the motions and amendments passed but overall this is not the case.

Many of the motions passed, in particular, over the Baker Bill, Alton's Bill and the poll tax, which had clauses committing the NUS to work with dissident Tory or liberal MPs, came directly from the ranks and politics of Nols and the CP. These motions also had unspecific commitments to direct action, which let the NUS leadership off the hook.

To place too much emphasis on SSiN's role in the right-wing politics of the NUS and their popular frontist character, would be to ignore the real enemies of the class in the student movement who dominate the NUS, Stalinists, labourite reformists and class-collaborators.

Yours in comradeship  
N Solomons



# MERSEYSIDE MEMOIRS

THE PROSPECTS for local government in the late 1980s look pretty grim. The Tories have abolished a whole layer of metropolitan councils. They have hedged 'high-spending' Labour councils with restriction after restriction. Rate capping was followed by legal attacks helped by the huge weight of the media propaganda machine. The forthcoming Local Government Bill, of which Clause 28 is only the most notorious part, is yet another nail in the coffin of local democracy.

All of this seems a far cry from the heyday of 'local socialism' in the early 1980s. Then left-Labour led councils flourished in London and many other major cities. Many thought that 'socialism on the rates' could serve as a viable alternative to the Thatcherite 'revolution' that was in full swing, and pave the way for victory in national elections.

Yet one by one these councils fell victim to the Tory government. This, however, was not inevitable. Rather it was the product of their own hopelessly inadequate strategies of resistance. 'Fortress Islington' soon fell to making the required cuts. The 'socialist republic of South Yorkshire' has rejoined the rest of us under the billionaire monarchy. The GLC has been wiped off the face of the earth, and with it all its equal opportunities initiatives. And now the 'loony-left' councils everywhere are dutifully slashing budgets, cutting services and sacking workers.

## Different

These two books deal with the story of Liverpool council. Liverpool was different in more ways than one. From 1983 to 1987 the political leadership of Liverpool City Council was in the hands of supporters of the newspaper *Militant*, the self-proclaimed 'Marxist wing' of the labour movement.

It is from the perspective of this 'Marxism' that both books claim to be written. Both are attempts to justify their authors' parts in the Liverpool story. Taaffe and Mulhearn's work is the 'official' *Militant* history. Hatton's book, slimmer and quite patently ghost-written is a self-glorification of his role in events—in the best footballer's autobiography tradition. Despite this, Hatton's book comes closest to revealing the truth, unpalatable to Taaffe and Mulhearn, that in the end *Militant* squandered the chance to beat the Tories.

The rising fortunes of *Militant* in Merseyside coincided, by their own account, with the fall from grace and office of the Labour right wing—locally, and nationally in the shape of the Callaghan government. They also coincided with the rise of the Liverpool District Labour Party (DLP)—a delegate based Labour Party body—and the decline of the Trades Council, a delegate based trade union body.

## Forum

Up until 1967 these two bodies had (unusually) been one—the 'Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party'. A split was enforced in 1969 by the right wing 'Braddock machine' which dominated the Liverpool labour movement. By the 1980s the DLP had become, in Taaffe and Mulhearn's words 'the movement's main forum of debate and the focus of working class struggle'. The Trades Council, on the other hand, had become 'an inconsequential body, with very little participation in its deliberation by the major trade unions', i.e. it was boycotted by *Militant* supporters, who instead preferred to concentrate in the DLP. This order of priority, Labour Party first, trades unions second—apparent to any reader of *Militant*, or either of these two books—betrays a strategic orientation which was to lead to the downfall of Hatton, Mulhearn and the 47 other councillors who were surcharged in 1985 and disqualified from office in 1987.

Chris Ramsey reviews

### Inside Left

by Derek Hatton (Bloomsbury 1988 £3.95 174pp)

### Liverpool: A City that Dared to Fight

by Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn (Fortress 1988 £6.95 497pp)

*Militant* were, effectively abstaining from organising a class-wide forum which would have involved non-Labour Party members. This meant that *Militant* left the field free, in a whole number of areas, to the Stalinists. It meant that they restricted the council's own base. It meant that they substituted a party political body for a council of action embracing the whole Liverpool labour movement.

By 1983 Merseyside had become, in Taaffe and Mulhearn's words, 'a laboratory in which the ideas of both *Militant* and its opponents would be tested' (Taaffe and Mulhearn (T&M) p68). The question is, did *Militant* pass the test? Both books, obviously, say yes, albeit in different ways. The right wing, and the 'soft' left in the Labour Party say no.

The real test, the one to which *Militant* is formally committed, is the test of struggle. Whether a leadership can gather '... wide layers of the working class behind the banner of a militant labour movement, to educate and steel them, not just for the current battles but for the long term struggle to change society?' (T&M p69). Whilst *Militant* are no slouches about gathering supporters

parliamentary one: '...the struggle in Parliament must also be supplemented by the most determined "extra-parliamentary" methods on the part of the working class to back up any steps taken in Parliament.' (T&M p85)

This allowed Liverpool council to settle for '95% of what it was claiming' (T&M p151) from the government in July 1984—in the middle of the miners' strike!

*Militant* supporters hailed this, then as now, as a 'tremendous victory'. (T&M p151) Opening a second front against the Tories came second place to being seen to face down the government. Yet Taaffe and Mulhearn admit that:

'the Tories wanted to deal with the major "enemy within", the miners, before concentrating attention on crushing Liverpool' (T&M p156).

From this they draw the conclusion only that:

'in 1984 the Tories were already frightened by the prospect of a mass movement unfolding in Liverpool under a Marxist leadership!' (T&M p156)

A partial victory for Liverpool Council, at the price of a major setback for working class fighting unity

*'We were paying the price for the months of inactivity when we went along with the London line of refusing to set a rate. From January to June the workforce had watched us do nothing'*

behind their banner, their own evidence is that they precisely fail to educate and steel them—even for the current battles, let alone the future.

*Militant's* strategy, repeated times without number, is to usher in socialism via an enabling act in Parliament, to nationalise the top 200 monopolies under workers' control and thus bring about the peaceful transformation of capitalism—provided the capitalists don't fight back. This parliamentary road requires a parliamentary vehicle, hence their adherence to the Labour Party despite all attempts to remove them. Other struggles are seen as either a help or a hindrance to this aim. And the obstacle to the fulfilment of this scheme is not reformism *per se*, but the right-wing.

In Liverpool this grand plan translated itself into controlling the City council via control of the DLP, and using this control to start implementing pro-working class policies, as a living example of what a Labour government could and should do. When the capitalists—in the shape of their executive committee, the state and its government—fought back, the working class were to be mobilised to defend what they had gained, and thus radicalised, as well as setting an example to workers in the rest of the country. These radicalised workers were to bring down the Tory government and sweep to power a Labour government implementing these same 'bold socialist policies'.

The crippling factor in this equation was *Militant's* subordination of all struggles to the national and local

this do-nothing approach had done nothing to mobilise the working class of either borough. As Hatton puts it, ruefully:

'We were paying the price for the months of inactivity when we went along with the London line of refusing to set a rate. From January through to June the workforce had watched us do nothing. The campaigning spirit had gone out of the fight. When suddenly we went for a 9% rate increase the shop stewards were four square with us, but when we asked them to back us on the the redundancy scheme the lid blew.'

Taaffe and Mulhearn's hagiographical account could never be so candid.

The combination of months of inactivity followed by incomprehensible tactics was too much. It allowed the hostile union leaders, press and right wing to demolish the morale of the council workforce. This was enough for a narrow majority vote against an all out strike to defend the councillors surcharged to the tune of £106,000 each. Not only was the vote close, but the blue collar, manual unions had voted solidly for strike action, only to see their vote overturned by the council's white collar workforce.

## Strategic

In these circumstances a fighting, communist leadership should have used the vote for action amongst the strategic manual workers to kick off a strike, and then campaigned to bring out the rest of the workers behind their lead. Instead the *Militant* dominated shop stewards fell in behind the 'no' vote and accepted defeat. It is wrong, say Taaffe and Mulhearn, to think that the actions of a "determined minority" can bulldoze other workers to come out on strike without discussion and a democratic vote' (T&M p292). What nonsense. A determined minority of miners did bring out the majority and could have smashed the Tory offensive if they hadn't been left isolated by the treacherous bureaucracy. Moreover, had it not been for the determined minority of workers who took to the streets in February 1917 against the advice even of the Bolsheviks, a mighty revolution would not have been unleashed.

The point is not to ignore workers' democracy or engage in adventures. The ballot, in which Nupe and NUT members were not allowed to take part by their bureaucratic leaders, did not decisively settle the issue. A whole section voted to strike, and they were the strategic core of their workforce. Their action could easily have blasted the bureaucracy's control, thwarted their manoeuvres (and let us not forget that councillors who were in the TGWU were prevented from addressing a TGWU mass meeting by the Kinnockite bureaucrat and left faker Jack Dromey) and pose the question again to the non-strikers. Picket lines could have led to new mass meetings and a shift in the balance of forces in favour of action.

## Bankrupt

*Militant* did not argue for such a course of action. Their acquiescence to what was in fact only a minority of all council workers demonstrates again their bankrupt strategy in the trade unions—the price paid for a strategic orientation towards the Labour Party and a belief that rank and file trade unionists need only be organised to act as Broad Left electoral machines on behalf of *Militant*.

Taaffe and Mulhearn's book does succeed in revealing how and why *Militant's* politics failed the working class of Liverpool. It does so despite itself, despite its attempts to justify *Militant's* tactical errors and wrong strategy. Hatton's book demonstrates, in a lively style, what Taaffe and Mulhearn's turgid work tries to ponderously explain away, namely that *Militant's* politics failed the test of office in Liverpool. ■

Wp

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Summerfield Community Centre  
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Tuesday 8 March 7.30pm

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*The legacy of '68*  
Warwick University  
Thursday 10 March 1.00

### LEICESTER

*The NHS in crisis*  
Unemployed workers centre,  
Charles St  
Thursday 10 March

### READING

*Crisis in the health service*  
RISC, London Street  
Friday 11 March 8.00

### EAST LONDON

*The working class today*  
Durning Hall, Earlham Grove, E7  
Thursday 17 March 8.00pm

## MARXIST DISCUSSION GROUPS

### BIRMINGHAM

*Women's oppression and Marxism*  
Thursday 17 March 7.30

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# workers power



John Harris/IFL

# UNITE THE CAR STRIKES

**A BATTLE is looming in the car and truck industry. Workers have had enough of accepting lousy pay rises and enduring deteriorating conditions while the bosses coin it in. As one Renault worker put it: 'for over five years we have co-operated with the company to keep it viable'. Now they want something in return.**

All the major car firms have notched up big profits in the last period. Land Rover made over twice as much in the first half of 1987 as they did for all of 1986. Last year Vauxhall and Peugeot-Talbot recorded their first profits for ten years.

That fact has obviously deeply influenced the mood of the industry's workforce. One Rover worker put it frankly:

'We've had two years of profits now and its about time they gave us a better whack of it.'

Renault workers have struck against a 6% offer. Land Rover workers are out against an offer of only 4% new money a year over two years. Workers in Volvo trucks in Ayresshire are poised to strike against an £8 a week offer.

The picture in Vauxhall is more complicated. While the electricians are against it, Vauxhall manual workers have narrowly accepted a miserable deal. In money terms it is worth 11-14% over two years. And, far worse, it accepts a package of flexible working including three-shift maintenance and extra allowances as flexibility is introduced. Conditions have been sold for a pay rise below the present going rate.

There is more to the present conflict in the industry than the question of pay. Land Rover workers are already finding that the Tory government is insisting on holding the line where they are the paymasters. Across the industry they are set on preventing a wage explosion that could prove contagious. To this extent car workers are up against the government even if it has no formal incomes policy. It does have a clear policy of preventing all workers from achieving a national going rate set by the strongest sections, such as the Ford workers.

All car workers face a massive attack on their conditions. The fact that the car and truck bosses are in competition with each other means that they are all trying to impose the same conditions on their workers. Flexible working packages are what the bosses are after. And that is the front the workers must resist them on.

For years deteriorating conditions and speed-ups have laid the basis for the industry's present profitability. What the bosses are now saying is they want to intensify the work rate even more. It is clearly not enough to say, give us a little piece of your profits. Car workers have to say no to the new work practices and organise to resist them.

In order to survive the bosses have to compete with each other at the workers' expense. In order to resist the workers need to organise themselves across the entire industry. Only in that way can we stop workers being played off against each other in the cause of

'their' company's profits.

The present struggles can provide the basis for that coordination and organisation. Now is the time for a national car and truck shop stewards' meeting to organise a common fight. That fight must not only be based on a common policy on pay and a determination to win better rates. It must be based on a commitment to hold the line against flexible working despite the fact that the union officials are backing it.

Land Rover workers have gone out to other car plants asking for their support. That is good. But there is no better way of giving that support than car and truck workers coming out alongside Rover and Renault with their own claims. Peugeot-Talbot's present deal expires at the end of the year. Austin-Rover's deal expires in October. Now is the time for those workers to slam in their own claim, and to fight for it. In the face of such a tide the bosses would be forced onto the retreat.

The component firms will use the present strikes as an excuse for lay-offs if they can get away with it. Strikers must win the backing of the component workers. They too should fight for their own claims now. And, vitally, they must fight for work or full pay against the bosses' lay-offs.

These are vital days for car workers. Some of the old fire has returned. Workers are on picket duty who have never been there before. Now is the time to forge the car workers into a national fighting force and put an end to the years of being trampled on. ■

# FORD - WHAT NOW?

by Simon Anderson

**ON 18 FEBRUARY, Ford manual workers voted by about 70% to 30% to accept the company's fourth 'final' offer since negotiations began in October.**

This latest deal is for two years instead of the three that Ford originally said it needed. Otherwise nothing much has changed. The company has said that its flexible working proposals will only be introduced by local agreement. But the deal includes a commitment from the unions to the principle of radical changes in working practices.

So, have Ford workers won a victory? Yes—but not the victory they could have, given the problems the strike was causing for Ford's continental plants and the solidarity of the strike at home. A Combine leaflet summed it up rightly when it said:

'So we've won one year off. That is an achievement, and publicly that's a victory. Privately Ford will be laughing.'

This view is borne out by comments in the bosses' paper—the *Financial Times*. Initially headlines ran: 'An embarrassing U-turn after Ford misjudges the mood' (18 February). A couple of days later, the *Financial Times* had changed its tune somewhat. On 20 February, it had this to say on the changes in working practices:

'Given the lower unit costs these changes should bring, the agreement does not look like such a bad deal for the company.'

The union negotiators have lauded the 'non-imposition' clause as a commitment to change through co-operation. What it really is, though, is a complete abdication of leadership by the leaders. Instead of leading a united fight of all the company's manual workers against the introduction of Japanese-style working practices, they are leaving the workers in each plant to face the changes on their own.

The struggle against the introduction of changed working practices is now the order of the day,

together with fighting the proposed job losses—3,000 at Dagenham alone over the next four years. How can this be done?

A new shop floor leadership must be built within these struggles. An essential part of that leadership's job will be to rebuild shop stewards' committees. However, it would be a dangerous illusion to believe that all that is needed is simply a return to the early seventies. It was the political weakness of the organisations existing then that allowed the present decline in shop floor power to come about.

The problems that the workforce faces cannot be solved within Ford alone. The experience of the pay claim shows the scale of the fight that must be waged against both bosses and bureaucrats.

Claims must be formulated by rank and file delegates after a campaign of discussions at section and plant level. Stewards must fight for the right to veto changes in conditions or job allocation. Where redundancies or closure threaten, militants must fight for control over hiring and firing and for sit-in strikes to prevent closure or transfer of plant.

Ford workers will fight with one arm tied behind their back as long as they are kept in the dark about negotiations and the bosses' plans. Workers' control over work speed and all other aspects of production must be accompanied by the right to inspect the company's books. Above all, Ford workers need to take a lead in uniting with other workers in their industry by building a national shop stewards' committee that can really co-ordinate claims and defend jobs.

There will be resistance to changes in working practices from the shopfloor. The danger is that such disputes will remain localised and go down to defeat. The militants leading these disputes must be brought together and welded together into an alternative leadership that can challenge the likes of Murphy and Airlie and build a single class struggle union for all car workers. ■

## FREE ELEUTERIO!

NEWS HAS just arrived that Eleuterio Gutierrez Marcani, the Bolivian miner imprisoned in Oruro on trumped up charges, has been found guilty. The judge, known to be a right winger with connections to the ruling MNR party, has handed down a five year sentence to this militant class fighter. Worse, even after this has been served Eleuterio has to find \$4,000 to 'compensate' the mining company COMIBOL for the stolen equipment, before he is released!

Under Bolivian law this is a 'pre-sentence' which has to be confirmed by the Minister of Justice. The 'Free Eleuterio Gutierrez Campaign' is calling on all trade union and Labour Party branches to once again send letters and telegrams of protest to:

Palacio de Justicia,  
2 do. Juzgado de Partido en la Penal,  
Calle la Plata Esq. Ayacucho,  
Oruro,  
BOLIVIA.

with copies to the campaign:  
Steve Masterson,  
c/o BCM 7750,  
London WC1N 3XX.

Financial contributions are still urgently needed. Previous contributions have been used to employ a new lawyer and care for Eleuterio's children.

Eleuterio's union branch in the Bolivar mine has written supporting his case to the Human Rights Assembly in Bolivia. Translations of this together with copies of the judgement will be available to affiliates of the campaign and bona fide labour movement bodies on request, by the end of March.

## CARDIFF WITCH HUNT

**THE RIGHT wing's long running campaign to witch-hunt socialists from the Labour Party is being stepped up at a local level.**

Plasnewydd ward of Cardiff Central CLP has been suspended by the CLP executive for allowing an 'expelled' Militant supporter, Chris Peace, to attend its meetings.

The ward was acting in accordance with its democratically decided policy—re-affirmed only the day before the suspension was announced—of defiance of all witch-hunts and expulsions.

The ward must continue to defy the executive's decision and organise itself to carry on its active campaigning work against the Tory attacks. So too must the CLP if, as seems likely, the regional executive moves to close it down too. Only if the ward and CLP continue to defy the witch-hunt in this way can they

expose its anti-working class roots in Kinnock's 'yuppification' drive.

To continue to meet, campaign, select and stand candidates against the right wing's bureaucratic impositions gives us the best chance of defeating the witch-hunt. We can defeat it by mobilising the working class in our defence. We can do that by showing that we, not Kinnock's bureaucrats, are the ones fighting for working class interests. ■

by Jeremy Drinkall

### LAW '86

Labour Against the Witch-hunt '86 was set up to campaign against all expulsions of socialists from the Labour Party. For details or to give us information please contact:

### LAW '86

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